OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

ULTIMATE GUIDE: SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE HIGH-SPEED MASCOT

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

JON HARE REVISITS SWOS, CANNON FODDER AND MORE

ANALOGUE 3D HANDS-ON

DOES THE 4K N64 LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?

The Legacy Of

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

FUMITO UEDA ON THE CREATION OF TEAM ICO'S GARGANTUAN PS2 ADVENTURE

Also Inside

ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD
MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS
JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL
METROID PRIME 4: BEYOND
STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2
RED DEAD REDEMPTION
PLAYSTATION ODDITIES
MONTY ON THE RUN

The Making Of
LAST NINJA 2
WHY SYSTEM 3 TOOK ITS NINJA TO NEW YORK

Magazine Craft
RICH PELLEY
FROM AMIGA POWER TO ARCADE AND BEYOND

The Making Of
GOAL!
DINO DINI REVISITS HIS KICK OFF FOLLOW-UP

The Making Of
EARTHION
YUZO KOSHIRO ON CRAFTING HIS HIT MEGA DRIVE SHMUP

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PLAYSTATION 2 EXCLUSIVE?

DARRAN JONES

It's been eclipsed by its later remaster and remake, but *Shadow Of The Colossus* is still an astonishing piece of gaming in its original form.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing:
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt
Favourite game of all time:
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast

TIM EMPEY

I reviewed *God Of War II* at the time and it still holds up today. It's an excellent sequel, expanding on so much from the first game.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing:
Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth
Favourite game of all time:
God Hand

ANDY SALTER

Most of my PS2 gaming was spent playing *GTA III* and *PES*, but one exclusive I did play a lot of was *The Simpsons Skateboarding*. Yeah it wasn't great, but I enjoyed exploring Springfield.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding:
RTR: Imperium Surrectum
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

At the time of its release, *Jak And Daxter* impressed with its open world and immersive narrative. What impresses me now is that it's still such a fun platformer.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing:
Rayman Legends
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

GRAEME MASON

Cold Winter. Its gameplay may be bang-average, but I remember really enjoying the story by comic-book writer Warren Ellis.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Sonic The Hedgehog 2. Rest in peace, Nick.
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4

ANDREW FISHER

The original *Katamari Damacy* was NTSC-only, but I had the hardware to enjoy this quirky and innovative game.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing:
Oh Mummy!
Favourite game of all time:
Wizball

DAVID CROOKES

For me, *Shadow of the Colossus* was breathtakingly fresh and absorbing. I loved its minimalist approach.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing:
Prince Of Persia (2008)
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

MARTYN CARROLL

It's got to be the *Jak And Daxter* series, especially the second game which is one of Naughty Dog's very best, and that's a high bar.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
Red Dead Redemption
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...

We unfortunately start the new year with some sad news. The magazine was dealt a tremendous blow late last year when the talented Nick Thorpe, our incredible features editor, sadly passed away on 1 December. Nick, who had recently celebrated his 13th year on the magazine, was a huge part of **Retro Gamer**'s success thanks to his great articles, sheer passion for retro gaming and the huge amount of work he did behind the scenes. With that in mind, this issue will feature several tributes to Nick and the games he loved, starting on page 6.

Our cover feature this month looks at the astonishing *Shadow Of The Colossus* with input from its director Fumito Ueda. We also speak to Joe Houston, who worked at Bluepoint Games, to discuss the game's stunning 2018 remake for the PlayStation 4.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find an Ultimate Guide on *Sonic The Hedgehog*, The Making Of *Earthion* and a look at the magazine career of Rich Pelley. We also speak to Dino Dini about the creation of *Goal!*, chat to Jon Hare about the many great games of Sensible Software, go behind the scenes of *Last Ninja 2* and quiz Rob Hubbard about his legendary soundtrack for *Monty On The Run*. Oh, and there's a great subs offer on page 30.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

CONTENTS

>> Load 281 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

6 **Main News**
We pay tribute to our dear friend and colleague Nick Thorpe

8 **Mike Mika**
Find out what happened when Mike met the legendary Jeff Minter

9 **News Wall**
Where we round up all the latest news

10 **Iain Lee**
Keyboards or joysticks? Iain has a preference, but what's yours?

12 **Mr Biffo**
Paul misses the weird AAA games of the old days

14 **A Moment With**
It may be a small YouTube channel, but Bloggo's POW! is still worth watching

16 **Back To The Noughties**
The keys are passed to Martyn Carroll and he heads off to August 2009

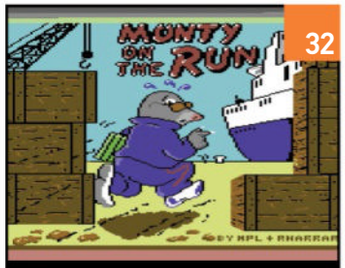
REVIVALS

18 **Alex Kidd In Shinobi World**
Discover why Alex Kidd's last Master System game was a great swan song

46 **John Madden Football**
Darran was never the sportiest of youngsters, but he was pretty good at digital American football

60 **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
We quickly learned two things at work – don't play Nick at puzzle games or fighting games

76 **Red Dead Redemption**
Rockstar's prestigious Western is old enough to appear in the mag. Now to look for a cheap Steam copy.



FEATURED

32 **Music Memories: Monty On The Run**
Rob Hubbard's sonic masterpiece is arguably one of the greatest C64 SID tunes of all time. Here the music maestro explains how it came to be

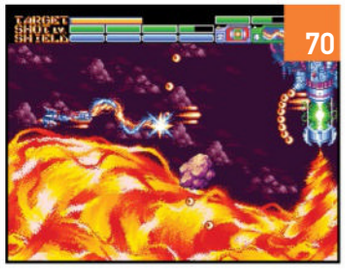
38 **Covermount Corner: Crash #89**
James Konik once again dives into the past and uncovers a couple of covertapes that had a great selection of games and demos on them

48 **Magazine Craft: Rich Pelley**
Freelancer extraordinaire Rich Pelley looks back at his time on *Your Sinclair*, *Amiga Power*, *Arcade* and transitioning over to interviewing celebrities

54 **Secret Service: Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf**
After losing his rag trying to get the Amiga version of *Worms* to load, Darran said "sod it" and hunted down cheats for EA's cerebral shooter instead

68 **Retro Gamer's Favourite... PlayStation Oddities**
Nick loved weird and wonderful games, so the cult YouTuber Sean Seanson has assembled ten of his own personal picks

70 **The Making Of: Earthion**
We go behind the scenes of the brand-new shmup by Yuzo Koshiro that's designed to run on a stock Mega Drive



The Legacy Of: Shadow Of The Colossus
We look at the original game's creation with Fumito Ueda and Rory Little and discuss the remaster and epic remake with ex-Bluepoint staffer Joe Houston

The Making Of: Last Ninja 2
Mark Cale explains why New York was chosen for the second game in the hit System 3 series

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SEE PAGE 30

62 **A Tribute To: Sensible Software**
Cofounder Jon Hare revisits the studio's biggest hits, from *Wizball* to *Sensible World Of Soccer*

56 **The Making Of: Goal!**

REVIEWS

78 Analogue^{3D}
80 Terminator 2D: No Fate
80 Telenet Shooting Collection
80 Metroid Prime 4: Beyond
80 Marvel Cosmic Invasion

ESSENTIALS

82 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher kicks of 2026 with all sorts of fantastic scene releases

86 **Hot Topic: Magazines Of Yesteryear**
Tim and Darran look back at some of the old games mags they used to enjoy

88 **Collector's Corner**
Our latest collector has some lovely items, including some cool statues

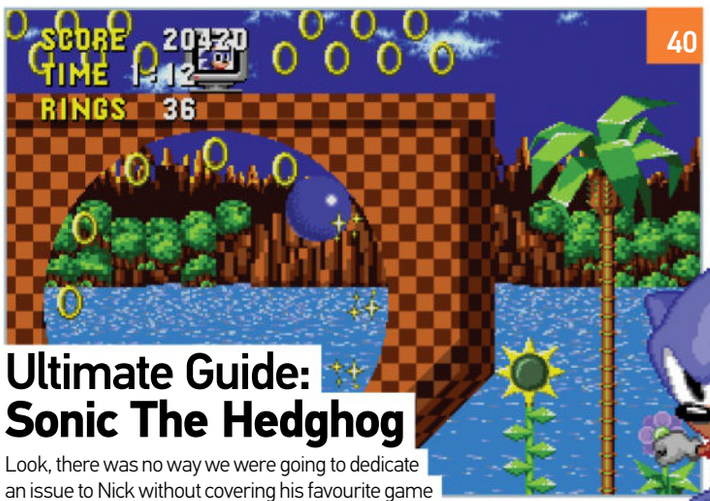
90 **Gaming Grails: Mega Man: The Wily Wars**
Got a grand burning in your pocket? This Capcom rarity will make it disappear

92 **My Retro Life**
Darran discusses the impact *Magic: The Gathering* has had on him

94 **Mailbag**
There's some lovely tributes to Nick this issue

97 **Next Month**
Only one option will make the cover, but which one?

98 **Endgame**
The year kicks off with a *Road Runner* ending



40 **Ultimate Guide: Sonic The Hedghog**
Look, there was no way we were going to dedicate an issue to Nick without covering his favourite game

Celebrating NICK THORPE

Saying goodbye to one of Harlow's finest

CONTENTS

6 CELEBRATING NICK THORPE
We pay tribute to a great writer, a lovely person and a good friend

8 MIKE MIKA
Discover how a trip to CES led to Mike meeting a gaming legend

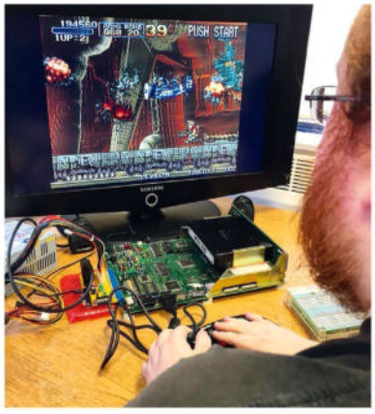
9 NEWS WALLS
All the latest news, including brand-new *Tomb Raider* and *Mega Man* games

10 IAIN LEE
Our resident columnist makes a case for using a keyboard over a joystick

12 MR BIFFO
Paul looks back to a time where the big games were a lot less corporate

14 A MOMENT WITH
We speak to the creative behind the obscure YouTube channel Bloggo's POW!

16 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Martyn Carroll is on-hand to continue the journey that Nick sadly couldn't finish



» One of Nick's pricier investments was a Neo Geo MVS and he'd often keep it in work so he could beat us at *Metal Slug* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*.

From the moment I interviewed Nick, I knew he was the right person for Retro Gamer. I didn't realise at first, but we'd actually met before at a gaming event some years earlier. He reminded me that he had asked if he could buy my copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for £40, only for me to politely turn him down as I wanted £45 for it. We had a laugh about its rising cost and returned to the interview, which he nailed, because of course he did.

Nick grew up in Harlow where he attended Mark Hall and would help his dad Erik on weekends at C&S Autos, the family run business owned by Erik's dad Colin. He later attended the University Of Essex where he studied and excelled in politics and also did freelance work for the website Arcade Heroes. While Nick spent the majority of his working career on **Retro Gamer**, his mum Denise told me that he did many different jobs, including Science Alive and handled events (amongst other things) at the University Of Essex before joining the mag. She did mention that **Retro Gamer** was the one thing that "never felt like work to him". And Nick dedicated himself to the magazine with a tremendous passion. His first work appeared in issue 124 and he'd often joke about it being a review for *Killer Instinct* on Microsoft's brand-new Xbox One, instead of something actually old.

Nick could often be a shy, thoughtful, introspective guy, but he came alive when he talked about games, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, wrestling, heavy metal music, politics or anything else that he was passionate about. He had a particular love for that blue hedgehog and anything Sega related and was fortunate enough to interview a number of his Sega heroes, including Kenji Kanno, Yu Suzuki and Takashi Iizuka. When he wasn't meeting his heroes and asking them to sign his various games, Nick was typically punishing us at puzzle games. He had a skill and eye for puzzlers that bordered on brilliance and the core team soon knew better than to play him at *Puyo Puyo Tetris* or *Columns* when he casually asked if anyone wanted a game.

» Nick started on issue 124 of **Retro Gamer** and became an essential part of the magazine's success. We all miss him dearly.

Nick was also very good at fighting games and could more than hold his own against some of the more skilled players in the office. His love of beat-'em-ups could be traced back to when he used to study karate with Erik, who is an instructor at Harlow Shotokan Karate Club. Despite having to relearn motor skills after he was hospitalised as a toddler, Erik says he never gave up, eventually making it to green belt and even attaining the bronze medal in a competition he entered.

> "His skills went beyond his exceptional writing and he did a lot of unseen work behind the scenes"

And that indomitable spirit is what made Nick such an important part of **Retro Gamer**. His skills went beyond his exceptional writing and he did a lot of unseen work behind the scenes, especially when it came to the quality of the magazine's screenshots. Nick was always there to help, just as he helped his mother and sister Louise when he moved back to Harlow during COVID. He was a guy of extreme generosity and he left a mark on all who met him.

"**Retro Gamer** is a unique brand of magazine team," says Drew Sleep, who worked as production editor on the mag for several years. "It's so closely knit that professional life meshes with personal, and before you know it, you're bonded with these awesome collaborators who you can also count as close friends. I often think of it as family. In that respect, Nick was like a big brother. He was always there, happy to offer advice, eager to share his stories; he always had an answer for a query, genius as he was, and he could slam a tetromino like no one else. I respected him deeply, and I miss him dearly."

That loss has been echoed not only by other teammates, but also readers (you can read their lovely comments on page 94), developers and publishers. "Nick was a true aficionado and a brilliant games journalist," says Jörg Tittel. "He poured an enormous amount of thought, effort and love into his work and it showed with every new issue of **Retro Gamer**. I last saw Nick in person a few months ago when he came to visit RapidEyeMovers' studio in London. We hung out for a couple of hours, played some classic games, as well as our titles we haven't announced yet. I'll miss our many little online exchanges, Nick's passion, knowledge, diligence and, most of all, his kindness. Nick deeply cared about those around him – and his words made every reader feel welcomed into his heart. Nick, you have now taken up a permanent place in our beautiful medium's precious history."

You'll find more tributes to Nick scattered throughout this issue, from a piece on his favourite game, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, to *Earthion*, one of his most-played games of 2025. Losing Nick so early in life has been crushing, but I can only imagine how devastating it must be for Denise, Erik, his stepmum Fiona, and Nick's sisters, Louise, Lianna, Kerri and Emily. Our thoughts go out to all of Nick's friends and family at this difficult time. You'll be missed, friend.

» Nick loved the games of Yu Suzuki so being able to interview him for the likes of *Edge* and **Retro Gamer** was a real honour.

» Even at a young age, Nick was fascinated with videogames.

» You probably all know by now, but Nick absolutely loved Sega's Master System and used to play on it with his sister Louise.

» Nick was a big fan of Nintendo's GameCube, having received one for Christmas.

» Here's Nick as a dungeon master for a photoshoot in issue 137. He often mentioned it was one of his favourite pictures.

» Family was incredibly important to Nick and he'd often write about them in the mag.

MORE EVERCADE CARTRIDGES

Blaze Entertainment recently revealed it was kicking off 2026 with two new cartridges. *The Turrican Collection* features eight games, including *Turrican 1, II* and *3, Mega Turrican* and both *Super Turrican* games. *Taito Arcade 3* features nine games and includes such gems as *Puzzle Bobble, Qix, Cadash, Cameltry, Football Champ* and the excellent *Zoo Keeper*. Look out for reviews in a later issue.

STREET FIGHTER

Capcom recently unveiled a teaser trailer for a new *Street Fighter* movie that's dropping later this year. While some of the character likenesses are pretty good, the trailer itself is not really instilling any confidence. It all looks rather messy and poorly choreographed, although that could be down to how it has been edited. Still, it made us nostalgic for the awful 1994 film.

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

Be like Jeff

How CES '94 gave two kids with a fake company a chance

In 1994, my best friend Bob and I went to the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago armed with dreams of making a big splash in games. We had a stack of perforated inkjet-generated business cards, and the dumb sort of confidence that comes from making videogames in your parents' basement. We had demos. We had proposals. In hindsight, none of them were all that appealing. Still, we arrived earnestly – if not foolishly – determined to wow the industry. And if the universe was feeling generous, we'd also find a way to sneak into the *Thunder In Paradise* boat party we'd heard rumours about.

Walking onto the show floor felt like stepping through the looking glass into a retina-searing, eardrum-bursting maelstrom of fog machines, laser rigs and scantily clad women dressed as futuristic supersoldiers. Everywhere, people in suits moved briskly and purposefully, as if the fate of the free world depended on their assessment of which new games would sell the most.

It took only five minutes for us to realise we were hopelessly out of our league. We were Neanderthals with sweat-smeared business cards. It was the first time in my life I truly felt the debilitating effects of imposter syndrome.

We almost skipped the Nintendo keynote, but the entire show buzzed with rumours that the Ultra 64 would finally be revealed. Bob and I hoped our childhood heroes might give us the emotional boost we desperately needed. We sat down just as it began. No Ultra 64 in sight. They showed great-looking Super Nintendo games. They had sequels and licensed tie-ins. Nothing unusual for the end of a console's life cycle. Then, at the very end, the lights dropped. One more thing.

The screen exploded in 3D. "This is it!" the guy beside us gasped as Donkey Kong, reborn and joined by a new sidekick named Diddy, filled the screen. A rapid-fire montage of jungle biomes, goofy enemies and impossibly good music rolled out, and the room absolutely lost it. Then the bomb dropped: it wasn't Ultra 64. It was the Super Nintendo.

Our imposter syndrome reached terminal velocity. Someone had made aging 2D hardware do the impossible. Exhilarating, yes. But also crushing. How did they pull it off?

> "Decades later, I got to work with Jeff on a collection based on his life's work"

Every interaction afterward felt like an audition we hadn't rehearsed for. And that's when we found the Atari booth. More specifically: *Tempest 2000*.

Tempest was one of my favourite games, so we pushed our way to the monitor. The new version hit every note for us: explosive visuals, incredible music, and a visceral vibe all its own. We were so hypnotised we almost didn't notice the man standing quietly beside it.

Jeff Minter. The punk wizard of videogames. The llama guy. My coding idol.

Everything about us radiated amateur fanboy energy. He could've ignored us. Instead, Jeff talked to us, like really talked. About the game. About how he made it. And, possibly sensing our existential collapse, about how the glitz of CES was just a noisy outer layer covering the only thing that mattered: the people who actually make the games. For him, it was probably a forgettable chat. For us, it was tectonic.

Jeff didn't fit the mould of the industry buzz around us. He was the opposite. An unbothered genius in a wool llama sweater in a sea of inconsequential business suits. And that was exactly what we needed: proof that the gatekeepers weren't gods. That success wasn't granted, it was earned. We had a new goal: Be like Jeff. Bob and I walked into CES as pretenders. We walked out with purpose.

Decades later, I got to work with Jeff on a collection based on his life's work. It was one of those rare moments of poetic symmetry life almost never gives you. Behind my desk sits a photo of Bob, Jeff and me. It captures the exact moment everything turned.

Two overwhelmed kids. One llama-loving legend. A reminder that the path forward is built by people who refuse to be anything but themselves. Be like Jeff.

Oh – and yes, we did sneak into that boat party. Hulk Hogan never showed, which meant we sat captive with a group of important industry people who were also hoping for a celebrity encounter. Instead, they got Bob and me awkwardly pitching our game about two garbage men named Norm and Pete who drove a monster truck and had an unhealthy relationship with cheese doodles.

I'm fairly certain at least one person considered jumping overboard.

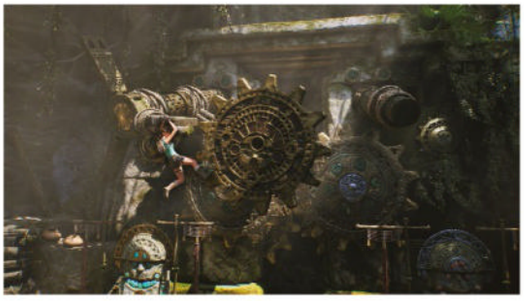
Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

LARA RETURNS

AMAZON GAME STUDIOS ANNOUNCES NEW TOMB RAIDER GAMES

After buying the *Tomb Raider* licence from Embracer in 2023 for a cool $600 million, Amazon is going to start recouping some of that money back. We already know that Sophie Turner will be playing Lara Croft in the incoming TV series arriving on Amazon Prime, but now we have new information about two new *Tomb Raider* games.



» [PC] It will be interesting to see how much *Legacy Of Atlantis* deviates from the original *Tomb Raider*.

» [PC] Lara will be portrayed in both games by Alex Wilton Regan who has voiced characters in numerous games, including *Cyberpunk 2077*.

Tomb Raider: Legacy Of Atlantis is a brand-new remake of Lara's original adventure and is due to arrive later this year. Developed in collaboration with Crystal Dynamics and Flying Wild Hog the Unreal Engine 5-powered game will offer impressive-looking visuals, new surprises and modern game design. The trailer doesn't really give away much, but Darran's pleased that the T-rex and raptors now have feathers.

If details were light on *Legacy Of Atlantis* they were even scarcer for *Tomb Raider: Catalyst*. Developed by Crystal Dynamics and currently planned for 2027 it looks to be a continuation of the *Tomb Raider* trilogy that ended with *Underworld*, and is set in the wake of a devastating cataclysm. Like *Legacy Of Atlantis* it will utilise Epic's Unreal Engine 5. Needless to say, we'll have more information about both games in the coming months.

» [PC] Will 2027 finally be the year that *Mega Man* appears on the cover of **Retro Gamer**?

» [PC] It has been 31 years since the original *Screamer* made its debut on PC. This looks like quite the overhaul.

GAME ON

THERE ARE PLENTY OF GAMES TO GET EXCITED ABOUT THIS YEAR

December's Game Awards highlighted several games, which are due to appear this year and beyond. Capcom officially confirmed that Leon Kennedy will be appearing in *Resident Evil Requiem* and it shared news of a brand-new *Mega Man* game. *Mega Man: Dual Override* is a new side-on adventure that's planned for 2027.

Another big surprise from the Game Awards was that Milestone's *Screamer* series appears to be coming back. The original arcade racer was first released in 1995 when the studio was known as Graffiti and the new game seems heavily inspired by both Japanese street drifting and anime. While there wasn't any news on the remake of *Knights Of The Old Republic*, *Star Wars: Fate Of The Old Republic* and *Star Wars: Galactic Racer* did generate a lot of attention, with the former being pegged as a spiritual successor to BioWare's classic RPG.

In addition to breaking the news that *Total War: Warhammer 40,000* was on the cards, Creative Assembly also revealed its new Warcore Engine and that *Total War: Medieval III* is being planned, but we can't imagine that dropping before 2027.

Other things to look out for include a new *Divinity* game from Larian Studios, a new expansion pack for *Diablo IV*, the eighth official instalment of the *Ace Combat* series and a new episode of *Hitman: World Of Assassination* featuring Milla Jovovich.

RAINBOW BRIGHT

If you didn't like the black-and-white options for the recently released Analogue^{3D}, a range of new colours are now available. While the news will certainly upset early adopters who invested in the original machine, it's bound to be of interest to anyone that sat on the fence. There are eight colours in the new Funtastic range and they will retail for $299.99, $30 more than the base units.

MORE MILESTONES

Taito recently revealed that the fourth compilation in its *Taito Milestones* series is planned for later this year. The ten featured games include *Arkanoid*, *Cameltry*, *Water Ski*, *Typhoon Gal*, *Kuri Kinton*, *Field Day*, *Bonze Adventure*, *Don Doko Don*, *The Ninja Kids* and *Syvalion*. Seven of the games already feature on the digital *Arcade Archives* series, so keep that in mind when preordering.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Feeling shifty

I wrote a while ago about different kinds of joysticks and within that article I briefly touched on keyboard controls. It started with the example of when I'm playing *COD* or *Fortnite* with my kids, they will side-eye me when I ask what the keys are. I might as well be speaking Chinese. They also laugh when I call the sound conveying devices you put in your ears 'headphones'. I want to talk more about the importance of keyboard gaming for me, a 52-year-old man who grew up with the Dragon 32 and BBC Micro. How in the Eighties, keys were the ONLY way to play and enjoy gaming.

This is on my mind because I am currently watching the excellent Amigo Aaron from Amigos Retro Gaming trying to play BBC games on his three-hour Gaming Disaster stream. Every time a game comes up and it lists the keys (the BBC games were always very kind in generally telling you what buttons to press) he metaphorically slaps his forehead and literally says, "Gosh darn it." He seems flummoxed by the prospect of having to get hot and dirty on his keyboard. Some of the games have joystick options but not all.

I'm chuckling because it's all so familiar to me. Z and X will forever be left and right. I do an occasional podcast called *Random Access Memories*. It was so nearly called Z, X, Left, Right but I thought it a little too obscure for more than a handful of people. I played a few games back in the day on a joystick, but I always found them deeply inadequate. The Beeb had those crappy sticks that didn't self-centre and were just deeply unsatisfying. They made playing, for me at least, almost impossible. Also, these things were expensive and there was no way my parents were going to shell out on one for me. I certainly wasn't going to save my pocket money or later my Bejams earnings. I wanted to buy games (and then later beer, but that's a story for another day).

Maybe a stick would have helped me dock on *Elite*, one of the toughest gaming challenges known to humankind, but beyond that I don't see any benefit. How would *Citadel*, *Snapper*, *Frak!* be improved by holding a long thing in your hand and waggling? They wouldn't. There is no way I could be as precise. And in 1984 you needed pixel-perfect precision. One tiny dot on the screen too far left or right and you were toast. Brutal in a way that seems tortuous to today's snowflake generation. You haven't lived until you've spent an hour on one screen of *Manic Miner*. They should give that as a punishment in schools instead of detention. There is no way 13 year olds are going to find that fun.

Were you a keyboardist or a joystick snob? Which way do you fall? Feel free to let me know and tell me why I am right. I know it's all subjective but this is a hill I am very much prepared to die on. *

> "The Beeb had those crappy sticks that didn't self-centre and were just deeply unsatisfying"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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AORUS

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

When weird was mainstream

When it comes to today's mainstream AAA games – the ones that end up on magazine covers, and get widespread review coverage – it's fair to say that things have become that much more corporate. Big teams making big games designed for big sales. Consequently, it's rare to find a big, modern, game with any idiosyncrasies.

Sure, you could say that the likes of *Elden Ring* or pretty much anything by Hideo Kojima has a singular identity, but those feel like outliers. The indie scene – small teams, personal, curated – is where personality can be found in modern gaming, but many of those games disappear under the radar.

It's all a far cry from the halcyon days of my Eighties youth, where even the biggest games were, y'know, a bit weird. And I'm not just talking weird in the sense of cultural differences; a lot of modern Japanese games I find almost off-puttingly strange. The *Yakuza* series, for example, or – yes, I'm a heretic – the *Final Fantasy* franchise, I've always struggled with.

Thing is – and this is unlikely to be a surprise to anyone who used to read *Digitiser* – I like weird. I like the surprise of a bizarre juxtaposition, the unexpected. It's why a lot of my formative games remain among my favourites.

To pluck one out of the ether… *Pyjamarama*. It was a big game at the time – the equivalent of what today would be, I dunno, *Ghost Of Tsushima* or something.

And yet, it stars an average middle-aged man – not some lantern-jawed, sword-wielding hero. Instead of setting out on a quest for bloodthirsty revenge, Wally Week is trapped in his own nightmares, looking for the key for his alarm clock so that he can get up for work on time.

Along the way, Wally encounters bizarre dream creatures, floating ghosts, and a surreal interpretation of *Space Invaders*. It's a literal fever dream – a sort of better-looking version of the even more bizarre *Jet Set Willy*. The sort of game now that would have 'cult indie hit' stamped all over it, and yet back then it beat the classic *Elite* to be Game Of The Month in *Personal Computer Games*!

Then you had stuff like *Pimania*, a text-and-graphics adventure by Mel Croucher. It was the first videogame with a real-life prize – a golden sundial which could be found by solving cryptic clues hidden within. This obviously drew a degree of interest, but this was for a game in which the main character was a weird, pink, bulb-nosed, goon with the Pi symbol tattooed onto his torso. *Sinclair User* declared it, "The best adventure game we have reviewed for the 48K Spectrum!"

Back then, we just accepted that games were weird. There was no risk to releasing a weird game. The risks were lower, and so creators could indulge their own oddness. I mean, has there ever been anything as utterly bizarre as *Deus Ex Machina*? It's another Mel Crouchr game in which the player plays – or, sort of lives – through every stage of life from conception to death. All while you listen to an audio cassette featuring a synchronised soundtrack and the voices of Jon Pertwee, Ian Dury and Frankie Howard. I mean, it was avant-garde to the point of being unplayable, but at least it had character. *

> "I like the surprise of a bizarre juxtaposition, the unexpected. It's why a lot of my formative games remain among my favourites"

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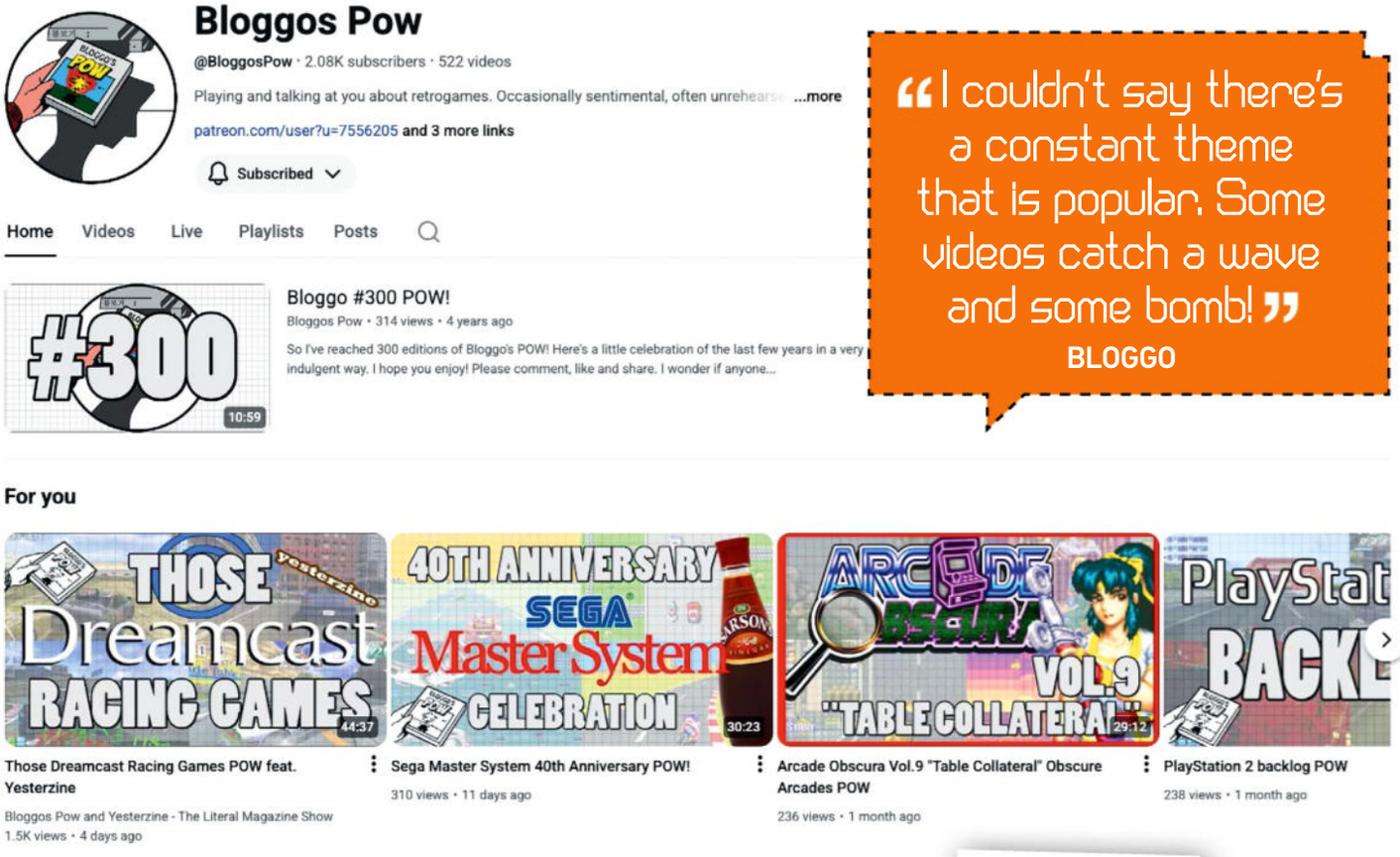
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"I couldn't say there's a constant theme that is popular. Some videos catch a wave and some bomb!"
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44:37
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Bloggo's POW!

We speak to Bloggo about his entertaining YouTube channel that focusses on niche retro games

With a small following of just over 2,000 loyal subscribers, it's quite possible that Bloggo's POW! isn't on your radar. That's a real shame, as it's a fun little channel with a focus on quirky retro games and great shmups. We spoke to Bloggo to find out more.

So what does the name Bloggo's POW! mean?
Remember those old anti-piracy adverts from the late-Eighties and early Nineties magazines? One of them had a fictional game called *Bloggo's Pow!* So yeah, my name is pirated from an anti-piracy campaign.

What made you create the Bloggo's POW! channel?
I wanted to do something YouTubey for a while and was trawling through MAME and found some great games I'd never heard of and thought it might be fun to bring them along with games I do know to a larger audience. Well, larger than me anyway.

You've a particular affinity for shmups. What do you like about the genre?
It's always been the genre I've been drawn to since my first days in an arcade. It helps that I'm somewhat competent at them. I'm tragically awful at most other genres.

Why champion obscure games on the channel?
Other than the burning desire to share what I've found, it's also nice to feature a game just for a viewer to comment that they'd been trying to remember a game just to see it on the channel. I love it when that happens.

How long have you been working on your channel now?
The channel has been going for about 11 years. The biggest challenge is keeping the obscurities coming. That and fighting YouTube's algorithm to get my videos into people's eyes on a Saturday morning.

» Bloggo has been working on his channel Bloggo's Pow! for the last 11 years and has built a loyal following.

So why choose Saturdays to showcase new videos?
It used to be primarily out of necessity. Saturday mornings being the only time I could find the time to do anything. I'd get up at about 5am, record some gameplay, edit it together and it would be uploaded by 8am. I don't do it all in one go now but a lot of my viewers are waiting every Saturday morning to watch it with their bran flakes or grape nuts or whatever. I don't eat breakfast.

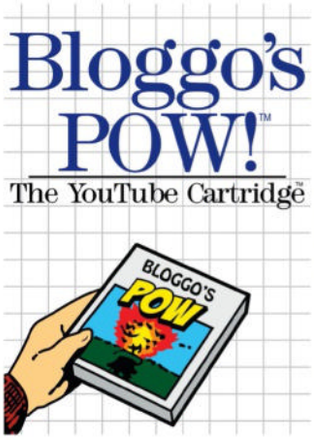
Do you get much support from the likes of Patreon and Ko-Fi?
Yeah, I have a few lovely folk that support me on Patreon. They are great people and if you want to join them at the end of video shoutouts, the link is in the channel description.

Which of your videos tend to be the most popular?
It's odd, as I couldn't say there's a constant theme that is popular. Some videos catch a wave and some bomb! One video was a very dodgy review of an equally dodgy AliExpress arcade stick with games in. It topped 17,000 views for some reason.

How did it feel putting out your 500th video?
Exhausting? Nah, I'm happy that

» [PC] One of Bloggo's more recent videos saw him covering *Silver Bullet* and several other Steam games.

» [Arcade] If you know how *Alpha One* jumped from the Amiga to the arcade, Bloggo would love to know.



» We're guessing Bloggo was a big fan of the Master System back in the day.

» Bloggo's videos often feature four different games and cover all sorts of topics.

» [Arcade] Bloggo features a number of shmups featuring helicopters on his channel. This is *Twin Eagle*.

I'm still doing this and I really enjoy putting the videos together.

Why do you think viewers enjoy your videos?
Obscure games for sure, helicopters too. People complain if I don't get helicopters in there. I'm not sure they're here for my gameplay skills so it must be my sparkling personality. This is actually extremely unlikely.

Do you ever do collaborations with other YouTubers?
Yes, I have collaborated with Dudley from Yesterzine and I've done voice-over on his. I like doing colabs but due to my inability to plan anything in advance it doesn't happen as often as I'd like.

What has been the trickiest video to make?
It was one of the collaborations with Yesterzine. We did a two-part video on a bootleg Mega Drive multi-game cartridge. This involved two capture streams (from real hardware, no less) and two voice channels on a Zoom call and editing it was a nightmare.

What's the worst and best shmups with helicopters then?
The best I've found that folk might not know is *Twin Eagle*. It's such an Eighties game. Sprites that have an odd digitised look and a bizarre digitised vocal rock soundtrack. It's definitely unique. The worst off the top of my head is probably *D-Force* on the SNES. So bad I've not actually covered it on a video. Yet

What's been the most interesting game you've discovered and why?

» It's not just old games that Bloggo looks at. Sometimes he'll cover the latest homebrew releases as well.

I once came across an obscure shooter called *Alpha One* on MAME. It was not a good game, with awful gameplay and hideous graphics. I commented that it looked like an Amiga public domain game. Thirty seconds on the internet later proved that it was an Amiga game. How that ended up on a PCB attached to a coin slot mystifies me to this very day.

Is channel growth important?
Growth is nice but I don't like to pay too much attention to it. Watching your figures flap about to the tune of the algorithm can be equally exciting and demotivating. ✱

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

AUGUST 2009 – The kids are off school and everyone is on holiday, but there's always time for gaming and this August was busier than most when it came to high-profile releases and announcements. Join Martyn Carroll as he takes the DeLorean for a spin into the past

» [PlayStation 3] After a number of disappointing *Batman* games, the Dark Knight returned to form in *Arkham Asylum*.

NEWS AUGUST 2009

On 29 August, Noel Gallagher announced that he had left British rock band Oasis. After a backstage altercation with his brother Liam, as they were getting ready to play a gig in Paris, Noel walked out on the group. "It's with some sadness and great relief to tell you that I quit Oasis tonight," he said in a statement. "I simply could not go on working with Liam a day longer." The band wouldn't get back together again until 2024.

In sport, on 16 August at the World Athletics Championships in Berlin, Jamaican Usain Bolt set a new world record men's 100m time of 9.58 seconds, beating American Tyson Gay who ran 9.71 seconds. At the time of writing (December 2025), Bolt's record still stands.

In entertainment news, on 31 August Disney announced that it was to acquire Marvel Entertainment for $4.24 billion – a bargain when you consider that the last two *Avengers* movies alone made more than that at the box office. Meanwhile, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival ran 7-31 August. This year's 'best joke' prize went to comic Dan Antopolski, who asked, "Hedgehogs. Why can't they just share the hedge?"

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 2009

August means summer and the usual software drought, as the industry snoozes ahead of the busy autumn months and the arrival of the usual suspects: a *Need For Speed* game in September, the new *FIFA* update in October and the latest *Call Of Duty* release in November. We know the drill.

Yet this August was different, as little-known Brit developer Rocksteady unveiled a contender for not just Game Of The Year, but Game Of This Generation. *Batman: Arkham Asylum* landed on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 at the end of the month to huge critical acclaim. It wasn't a surprise hit – previews had been buzzing about it for months, with *GamesMaster* magazine calling it, "One of the most exciting titles of 2009," but its brooding mix of stealth gameplay, smart combat and wonderful storytelling exceeded all expectations.

» [Wii] *Metroid Prime 2* was updated and enhanced for inclusion in *Metroid Prime: Trilogy*.

It was even awarded a Guinness World Record for the Most Critically Acclaimed Superhero Game Ever based on its average Metacritic score of 91.67 (an honour it would hold until the sequel – *Arkham City* – arrived in 2011). The critical response translated into strong sales, with 2.5 million copies sold in its first four weeks. As a comparison, Activision's *Wolfenstein* reboot was also released in August and barely shifted 100,000 copies in the same timeframe.

Over in Wii world, Nintendo published *Metroid Prime: Trilogy* this month. This collection from Retro Studios gathered together the 2007 Wii entry *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* with the first two games originally released for the GameCube (and now 'enhanced' with motion controls, natch, and other features borrowed from *Corruption*). It was a generous release (*Official Nintendo Magazine* called it, "The best three-for-one offer ever… the bargain of the century.") and it

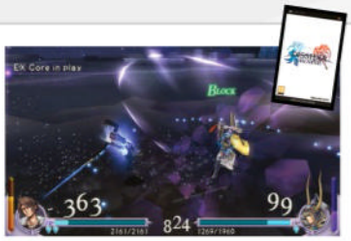
paved the way for the fourth *Metroid Prime* game that would surely be along sometime soon…

If classic *Metroid* was more your thing, this month saw the arrival of a substitute. *Shadow Complex* from Chair Entertainment was released as part of Xbox Live Arcade's second Summer Of Arcade. The standard of these seasonal downloadable releases was high – it followed *Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes* and *'Splosion Man* – and yet *Shadow Complex* still stood out from the pack. The *Official Xbox Magazine* celebrated this 2.5D Metroidvania, awarding it 9/10 and using every hyphen available to praise its, "Lovely-looking, old-school-style 2D action-platforming." And 2009's Summer Of Arcade just kept on giving, as *Shadow Complex* was joined by two other Live Arcade standouts: *Turtles In Time Re-Shelled*, an update of Konami's 1991 coin-op, and *Trials HD*, the console debut of RedLynx's stunt-bike game, in which the game's physics-based gameplay translated beautifully to the 360's controller.

Elsewhere, a couple of games made their long-awaited debut outside of Japan this month. The second *Professor Layton* game, *The Diabolical Box* (known as *Pandora's Box* in PAL regions) was released for the DS, despite being available in Japan forever. It appears fans held back from importing copies as it became Nintendo's fastest-selling DS launch in the UK ever. Also arriving late was *Dissidia Final Fantasy*, the fighting spin-off that finally hit the PSP and (just about) justified the delay by adding some neat new features.

The big hardware news of the month came out of the inaugural Gamescom event in Cologne, where Sony announced the PlayStation 3 Slim. The system followed Sony's previous mid-generation upgrades, being smaller, lighter, quieter, less power hungry and (in our experience) more reliable than the original model. It was also cheaper to buy, costing £249 in the UK and €299 in Europe when it launched just two weeks after the announcement. Obviously it lacked the premium finish of the 'Fat', but most reviewers accepted this concession. TechRadar called it, "A phenomenal piece of kit… it's amazing that something so small can do so much." And it rejuvenated PS3 ownership after a slow summer, with Sony announcing an 11-fold increase in sales following the Slim's release. It was also reported that the Slim was outselling the Xbox 360 by three-to-one – but Microsoft would quickly hit back with an exclusive new entry in its most popular franchise…

Join us next issue as we scope out September and discover what exciting news came out of this year's Tokyo Game Show. ✱



» [PSP] *Dissidia Final Fantasy*'s fast-paced one-on-one combat pitted iconic *Final Fantasy* heroes against one another.

» [Xbox 360] *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* was another highlight of Microsoft's Summer Of Arcade.

» [DS] Better late than never. Professor Layton and Luke return in *Pandora's Box*.

» [Xbox 360] Wearing its *Metroid* influences on its sleeve, *Shadow Complex* was one of the very best Xbox Live Arcade titles.

CHARTS

AUGUST 2009

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **Fight Night Round 4** (EA)
2 – **Call of Juarez: Bound In Blood** (Ubisoft)
3 – **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10** (EA)
4 – **Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen** (Activision)
5 – **Virtua Tennis 2009** (Sega)

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – **Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince** (EA)
2 – **Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen** (Activision)
3 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
4 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
5 – **Ben 10 Alien Force** (D3 Publisher)

WII

1 – **Wii Fit** (Nintendo)
2 – **EA Sports Active** (EA)
3 – **Grand Slam Tennis** (EA)
4 – **Mario Kart Wii** (Nintendo)
5 – **Indiana Jones And The Staff Of Kings** (LucasArts)

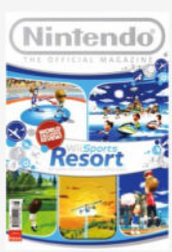
MUSIC

1 – **Black Eyed Peas** (I Gotta Feeling)
2 – **Supernova** (Mr Hudson ft Kanye West)
3 – **Sweet Dreams** (Beyonce)
4 – **Beat Again** (JLS)
5 – **I Know You Want Me (Calle Ocho)** (Pitbull)

THIS MONTH IN…

Official PlayStation Magazine

James Cameron discusses the *Avatar* game and how he persuaded Ubisoft to implement stereoscopic 3D. "They didn't think it was possible," he says. "But I planted the seed. They went away and two months later came back with a demo that convinced us all."



Official Nintendo Magazine

Eric Nofsinger of High Voltage talks *The Conduit* and whether there's a home for FPSes on the Wii. "If the gamers support it, then I think we will see more titles like this. Otherwise, we're going to see a lot more with 'Fit' and 'Sports' in their name."

GamesMaster

The magazine's highlight of this year's E3 show was Microsoft's prototype Kinect device. "The biggest announcement was saved until last… *Project Natal*, Microsoft's answer to the Wii-mote, was breathtaking." We guess hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Alex Kidd In Shinobi World

THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1990 » SEGA

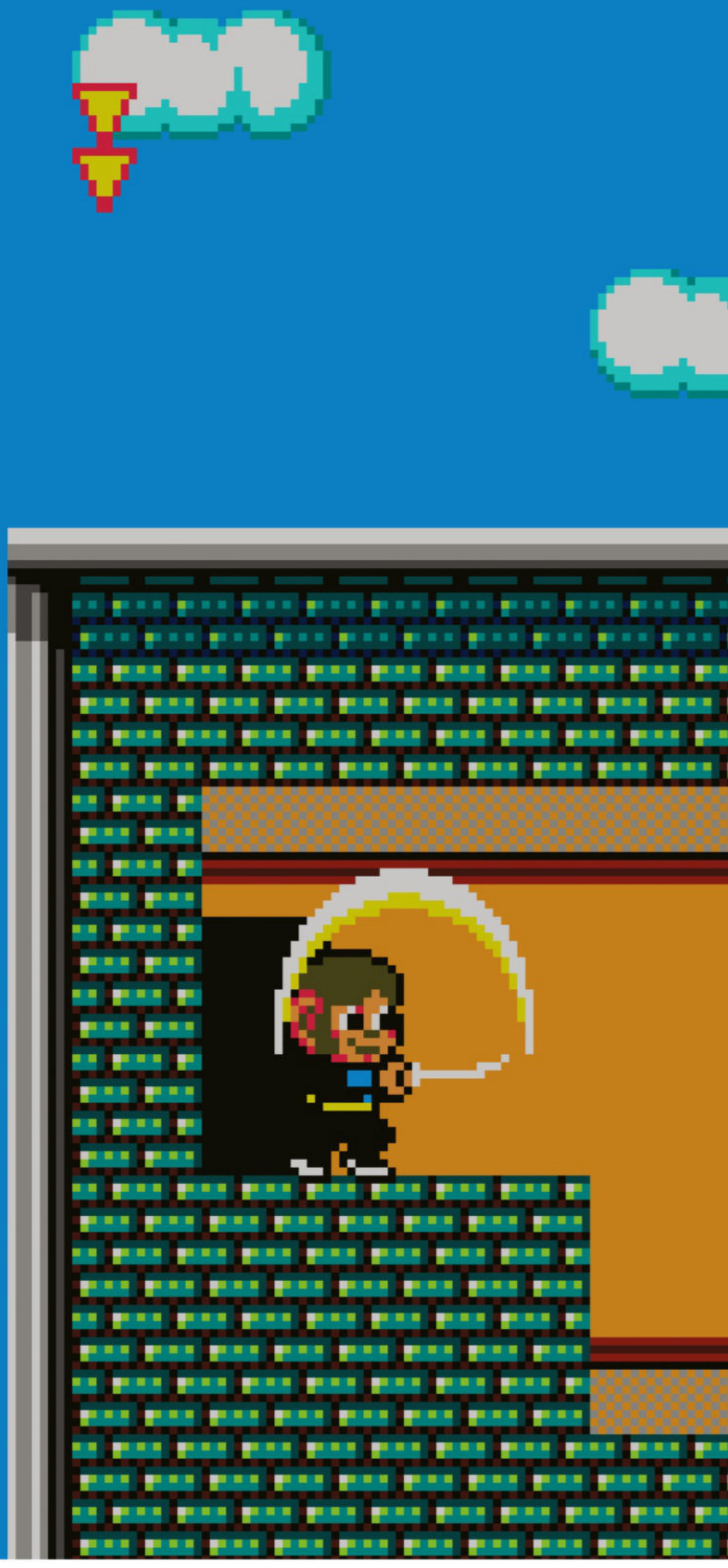
One of the things Nick and I bonded over when he first started on the magazine was our love for Sega's Master System. We both had the console as youngsters (me when it first launched, him a good while later in lieu of a Mega Drive) and we both loved its interesting library of games and numerous arcade conversions (Nick being a huge Sega fan).

Nick was a supporter of the underdog, in all aspects of life and that also extended to videogames. Anyone who owned Sega's 8-bit console will know that it's rarely remembered with the same fondness as the NES, so Nick always enjoyed writing about the system, whether it was an in-depth tech piece, or a nostalgia-driven article on a game he happened to love.

It made sense then that Nick was always going to enjoy *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*. It's a game that not only features an underdog hero, but was part of a franchise that nowadays is generally forgotten about, which makes sense as it was the final release in the short-lived series. (As you might imagine, Nick was a big fan of the *Miracle World DX* remaster in 2021.)

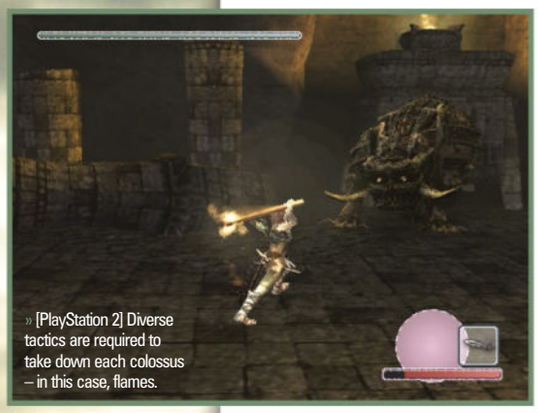
The beauty of *Shinobi World* is that it's not only an excellent swan song, but highlights how important a good crossover could be in the right hands. The game nails virtually every aspect of both the *Alex Kidd* and *Shinobi* series and the end result is a fitting love letter to both franchises. When Nick was writing the *Shinobi* cover feature for issue 276 we soon got waylaid about planning the actual feature (as we often would) because we both started gassing on about how much fun *Shinobi World* was.

And that was one of the things I loved about working with Nick. He was exceptionally passionate about the issues he believed in and the games he cared about and he almost convinced me that *Shinobi World* was such a pivotal part of the *Shinobi* series that it should have a far bigger entry within the feature than just a panel mention. Almost… ✱



EXIT

The Legacy Of SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS



» [PlayStation 2] Diverse tactics are required to take down each colossus – in this case, flames.

TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO, SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS STUNNED PLAYERS WITH ITS BREATHTAKING SENSE OF SCALE. IMMENSE ENEMIES AND WIDE-OPEN LANDSCAPES MADE IT AN UNFORGETTABLE CLASSIC. WITH FUMITO UEDA AND OTHERS CONNECTED TO THE GAME AS OUR GUIDES, WE EXPLORE ITS CREATION AND ENDURING LEGACY

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** TEAM ICO
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2
- **RELEASED:** 2005
- **GENRE:** ACTION

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ICO (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2
RELEASED: 2001

THE LAST GUARDIAN
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 4
RELEASED: 2016

A theme of companionship runs through the works of Fumito Ueda. In *Ico*, released in 2001 for the PlayStation 2, players guide an ethereal girl by the hand through an ancient world. In *The Last Guardian*, released on the PlayStation 4 in 2016, a close bond forms throughout the game with a giant animal. Between those two came *Shadow Of The Colossus*, the seminal, awe-inspiring action adventure that is now 21 years old, in which there is a sense of companionship with both the girl you are trying to resurrect from the dead, and to some extent, the giant creatures which you must destroy to achieve that goal.

"There are many different directions in which computers can be used for expression – visuals, special effects, and so on. Among these, what I chose to focus on was character expression," Ueda reflects when we ask about this running theme. "In particular, I was interested not in the protagonist, but in how NPCs could be made to feel compelling to players – that was where I saw real potential. More than the characters directly controlled by the player, it was the portrayal of these companions that became one of my central themes in creating videogames."

> "WE WANTED A SILLY CHARACTER AND CONSIDERED A DINOSAUR"
> **FUMITO UEDA**

By early 2002, *Ico* had proven to be a critical success, if not necessarily a huge commercial one. Ueda and his team, working within Sony Computer Entertainment Japan under the name Team Ico, had various ideas about how they might have greater impact with their next title. "After *Ico*, I considered several different directions," Ueda recalls. "One was an online game where players could co-operate with each other, another was a game using a touch panel for more intuitive interaction, and the third was an immersive experience using a head-mounted display. Among these, the idea I had been nurturing the longest – an online co-operative play experience where players challenge a giant being, like a colossus – eventually evolved into *Shadow Of The Colossus*."

You can find traces of the (ultimately discarded) multiplayer idea in a short prototype film that Ueda and his team created to set out their vision. In the film, three horse riders pursue an enormous creature. Watching it now, one notable difference from *Ico* is the wide-open landscape. "Since *Ico* was a game set within the confines of a closed castle, I wanted the next project to convey the experience of galloping across vast grasslands on horseback, almost as a reaction to that," Ueda explains. "More than focussing on the function of the field, I wanted players to feel its atmosphere. I think that desire is what gave birth to such a wide-open world." That stark and beautiful setting, the Forbidden Lands, persisted from the prototype into the final game, as of course did the core concept of battling vast monsters.

In the finished release there are 16 colossi to defeat as part of your quest to resurrect Mono, the young woman whom your character, Wander, carries into a shrine at the game's start. But Team Ico originally planned to create many more creatures. In the official Japanese art book for the game, Ueda revealed there were originally 48 planned, which was later reduced to 24 and then the final number. The art book shows eight of these unused colossi, including a spindly spider-like monster and a fire-breathing phoenix. This process ▶

FUMITO UEDA

■ Fumito Ueda is the creator of *Ico*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* and *The Last Guardian*, and founder of the studio genDESIGN.

RORY LITTLE

■ Senior character artist Rory Little worked on *Shadow Of The Colossus* during his time at Sony Computer Entertainment Japan.

JOE HOUSTON

■ Senior software engineer Joe Houston worked on the PlayStation 4 remake of the game while at Bluepoint Games.

MICHAEL LAMBERT

■ Also known as Nomad Colossus, Michael has amassed more than 75k YouTube subscribers for his work documenting hidden aspects of the game.

CRAFTING NICO

HOW AN EARLY PROTOTYPE DEMONSTRATED TEAM ICO'S VISION

Just as they had done for *Ico*, Fumito Ueda and his team created a cinematic prototype film early in the development of their next game. Opening with three horse riders galloping into battle, the movie sees these horned figures coordinate to bring down a massive colossi.

At this stage, the game was still known as *Nico*, and the intention was to create a reference point which the team could develop into a multiplayer experience. Alluding to the prototype, Ueda tells us, "One of my early ideas was to let players ride alongside each other on horseback, and to realise that, I needed landscapes that stretched all the way to the horizon."

While many aspects of the demo changed significantly in the final game, it acted as a template for the development team and helped them to pitch the concept to Sony. The film was included as a bonus DVD for those who preordered the game in Japan, with DVD extras including screenshots of the work-in-progress material. The film is also an extra for the PlayStation 3 remaster, with added developer interviews, including with producer Kenji Kaido who comments, "We saw the initial concept video and knew that Ueda-san would create another great game."

"IT FELT INAPPROPRIATE TO USE TRIUMPHANT FANFARES EACH TIME AN ENEMY WAS DEFEATED"
FUMITO UEDA

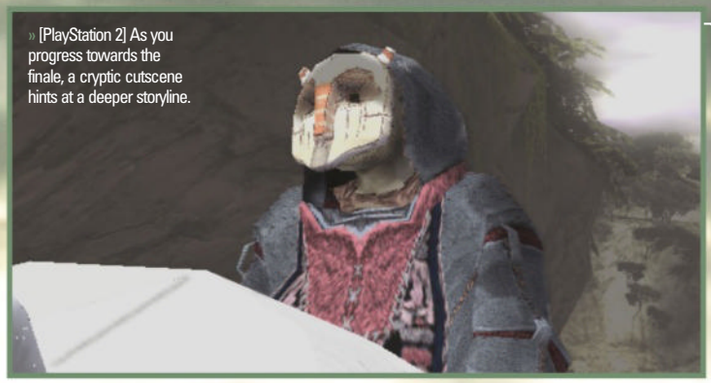
of whittling down the bosses resulted in 16 diverse giants that are truly awe-inspiring to fight against – so much so that there is a sense of tragedy about killing them. That sense is heightened by a mournful musical motif that plays at the end of a battle, each time a giant crashes to the earth. We wonder how Ueda expected players to feel after these encounters? "In truth, I wasn't aiming for players to feel any specific emotion in particular," he replies. "However, since the protagonist's goal – to resurrect someone who had died – was an immoral one, it felt inappropriate to use triumphant fanfares each time an enemy was defeated. That sense of wanting to avoid such dissonance, along with my desire to keep the story from becoming too predictable, ultimately shaped the expression you see in the game."

By the time *Shadow Of The Colossus* was released, the PlayStation 2 was more than five years old, and yet Team Ico was chasing many technology-pushing ideas. Were there any concepts that had to be dropped during development due to the constraints of the hardware? "There wasn't anything we had to abandon because it couldn't be realised on the PlayStation 2," Ueda replies. "In fact, I feel we were pushing the hardware to its very limits – perhaps even to the point of going too far." Playing the original game today, this does feel apparent. Above anything else, the game feels like a masterpiece for a work of the time. During boss battles, you can sometimes hardly believe the encounters are possible on the PS2.

Equally, as Ueda alludes to, there are signs of the hardware being stretched, such as framerate lulls that can occur during more frantic moments of action. And yet there is just so much to be impressed by. One of the great technical feats of the game is a mechanic Ueda and producer Kenji Kaido referred to in interviews as an 'organic collision defamation' system, which allows players to realistically scale and clamber across the giant colossi as though they were traversing solid ground. In an interview with the website Kikizo, Kaido described how the team needed to treat the colossi as "part building, and part living creatures".

Another technical feat from Team Ico was honing the behaviour and movements of your trusty steed Agro. Among those who helped achieve this equine excellence was senior character artist Rory Little. "I joined Sony Computer Entertainment Japan around 2004 or 2005, ostensibly to work on an *Ape Escape* title, but found myself helping out on pitch documents, as I had the broad range of skills that entails," Rory tells us. "During my time on the PS3 launch title *The Eye Of Judgement*, I got briefly shifted onto *Nico* as it was named in development. 'I-co': first child; 'Ni-co': second child," Rory explains about the working title for the game. A veteran of Team17, Rory was called in for his expertise in using LightWave 3D, an animation software Team Ico insisted on using, despite a software called Maya starting to take over in the wider industry by that point. In past interviews, Ueda has spoken about how one of his first forays into the videogame industry was teaching himself to use LightWave 3D after graduating from art school.

After starting on the project, Rory was tasked with tackling a specific problem concerning how smoothly Agro was moving around the landscape. He tells us there are some complexities with animating a moving horse, which requires two intertwining animations: applying a walk, canter or gallop motion to the animal, then simultaneously moving it from one point to another. "That results in what at first appears to be a good-looking animation, but on closer inspection it shows the hooves sliding around on the ground while they're in contact," Rory explains. "I fixed this by overriding the cycling motion with my own



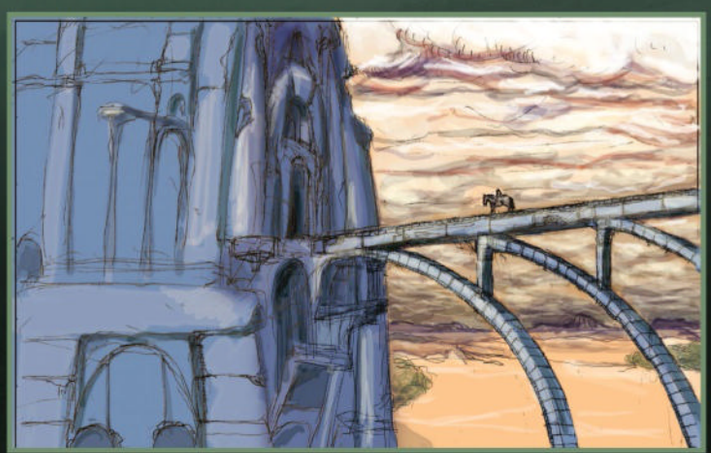
» [PlayStation 2] As you progress towards the finale, a cryptic cutscene hints at a deeper storyline.

» [PlayStation 2] As mournful music plays, killing these magnificent creatures may spark a sense of guilt.

[PlayStation 2] Linger long enough without making progress and gentle hints will appear.

» [PlayStation 2] Weak spots on each colossus glow blue when your sword is armed.

» [PlayStation 2] Despite draw distance being limited on the PS2, Team Ico crafted a spectacular setting that feels wide open.



COLOSSAL COMPOSITIONS

WHY THE EPIC SOUNDTRACK IS SO REVERED

■ Vast landscapes, gigantic monsters and tender companionship – all of these are part of the huge emotional journey *Shadow Of The Colossus* takes players on, and none of it would be quite so hard-hitting without the evocative soundtrack. Created by the film and game composer Kow Otani, who was shown the *Nico* demo by the team to help him understand their vision, the 42 tracks of orchestral music are sublime.

Team Ico weaved these sounds into the game in a dramatic, dynamic way. In an interview video released by Sony to coincide with the PS4 remaster of the game, Otani poignantly commented, "The music feels like you might have saved someone you love, but you couldn't save everyone you loved. For example, in the track *End Of The Battle*, you would think the music would be triumphant after winning. But as a whole, this soundtrack has more in common with a prayer or a requiem."

The soundtrack, titled *Roar Of The Earth*, was released on CD in Japan shortly after the original game was released. It's also currently available on some streaming platforms, and a remastered double vinyl release is available to buy from iam8bit.

» [PlayStation 2] Beams of light from your sword guide the way to the next enemy.

» [PlayStation 2] This reminds us of *Journey*, one of many games whose makers cite *Shadow* as an influence.

» [PlayStation 2] Clambering up a moving creature whilst managing your stamina gauge is half the battle.

▶ animation that used inverse kinematics. It let the hooves be unaffected by the other animation motions, meaning they could be positioned independently." Looking at how realistically Agro reacts both within the game and in cutscenes, this careful work to fine-tune the mare's movement clearly paid off.

Although his time with Team Ico was brief, Rory has fond memories of working with his Japanese colleagues and observed a good working culture in the team. "I chatted with the team and was friendly with them, and my seat was near their area in the open plan design of our floor," he says. "The game holds a special place in my memory. It represented a very happy time, where I was excited to be growing in skill and language facility too, as I worked with my hugely talented Japanese colleagues and got dragged by them to the izakaya drinking holes, to expand my culinary and beverage vocabulary and waistline."

Aside from those eventful outings, Rory is keen to reflect on how special the game was. "It stood out for having a unique game mechanic and unusually strong emotional and narrative beats. Furthermore, the fur and feathers technical solutions developed for the series were ground-breaking and very visually impressive." We should also share that Rory has a good story about another artist working on the game. "She chose to quit the game industry after *Shadow* was put to bed, and pursued a career in shoe design, spending a little time in Britain studying leatherworkers. 'Cobblers!' you might say, but it's true!"

While the art team was hard at work finalising graphical flourishes, the name of the game was also being polished. It was late in

BOSS RUSH

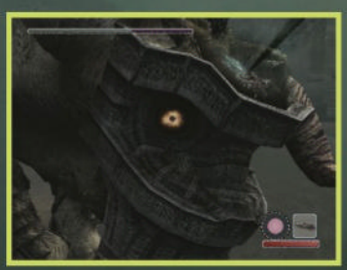
FANTASTIC BEASTS AND HOW TO FELL THEM

MINOTAUR A

■ "Thy first foe," as the shrine spirit introduces it, towers above a cliff. Its internal, developer nickname was Minotaur A.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Bring the colossus to its knees by stabbing a weak spot on its left leg. Ascend its back, then attack the sigil on its head.



MAMMOTH

■ Lurking in a seaside cave, this quadrupedal colossus will rear up and attempt to crush you and your horse Agro.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Whilst it rears, shoot an arrow at the underside of a hoof. Once it's slumped, clamber up its fur, watching your stamina, and target the head.

KNIGHT

■ One of the tallest colossi in the game, this behemoth stands in a circular arena wielding a long pillar of stone.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Provoke it into attacking, then jump onto its club and make the long way up to find a weak spot at the very top, and start stabbing.

KIRIN

■ This scaled beast emerges from the fog resembling a Kirin, the creature from Eastern folklore mixing dragon and horse features.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Lure the beast to one of the nearby tunnel entrances. As it searches for you, sneak out from a different entrance and climb its tail.

» [PlayStation 2] Pray beside a fallen colossus to fight them again in the sepia-tinged Reminiscence Mode.

» [PlayStation 2] The enormity of each colossus was breathtaking in the PS2 era, and remains so today.

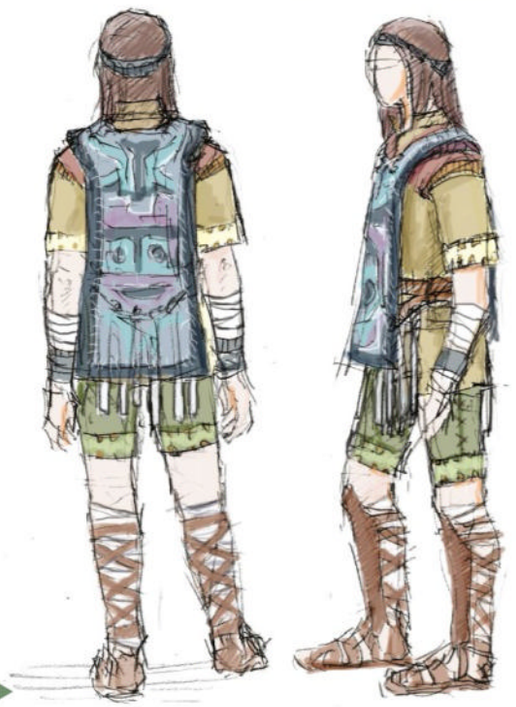
» [PlayStation 2] Plunging your sword into a giant brings spurts of jet-black life-blood.

2004 when Sony changed internal references to *Nico* to its final, intentionally fairytale-like Japanese title of *Wander And The Colossus*. The Western name for the game, however, was still being mulled over.

In December that same year, *Edge* magazine previewed the game under the heading *Ico 2* and described that label as "a moniker SCEE [Sony Computer Entertainment Europe] is keen to maintain for the Western release, rather than the literal translation". Ultimately, Sony Computer Entertainment America won the debate in the West with its proposal of *Shadow Of The Colossus* and by May 2005 the game was being exhibited by that title at the E3 show to an eager reception. *Edge* reported that the game "drew heavy crowds, all clamouring to get their hands on and heads around its sheer enormity", adding that there were "onlookers gasping at every arc and mist of blood that spurted from sword wounds". This enthusiasm was maintained on the game's release in October 2005 when it earned rave reviews, awards and recognition (such as being named IGN's Game Of The Year) along with sales figures that delighted Sony. A news report from Gamesindustry.biz at the time relayed that the game sold 140,000 units in its first week in Japan, putting it on track to very quickly surpass the 209,000 all-time total copies of *Ico* that had been sold in the country.

> "IT STOOD OUT FOR HAVING A UNIQUE GAME MECHANIC AND UNUSUALLY STRONG EMOTIONAL AND NARRATIVE BEATS"
> **RORY LITTLE**

By this point, the start of the PlayStation 3 era was not far away. Yet it would be several years before owners of the latest console would have a chance to experience an enhanced version of *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Instead of Team Ico taking the reins, development of the *Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus HD Collection* was handled by Bluepoint Games, a studio based in Texas renowned for its expertise

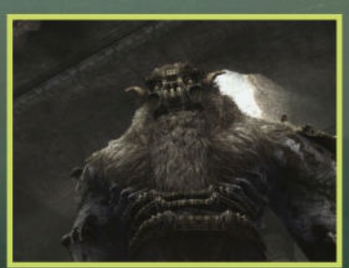


BIRD

■ The first flying colossus perches besides a misty lake. Reaching it involves diving through an underwater arch.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Shoot arrows at the bird to get its attention. When it swoops, dive onto a wing. Cling on hard and attack the wings and tail.



MINOTAUR B

■ This bearded giant is tricky to find. It lurks deep underground, beneath an ancient temple, beyond a dark forest.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Hide in the alcove found at the end of the hall. When the giant stoops to look for you, hold onto its beard and start ascending.

EEL

■ A long underwater creature with a catfish face and an electric eel body, this boss is a shocking, slippery character.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

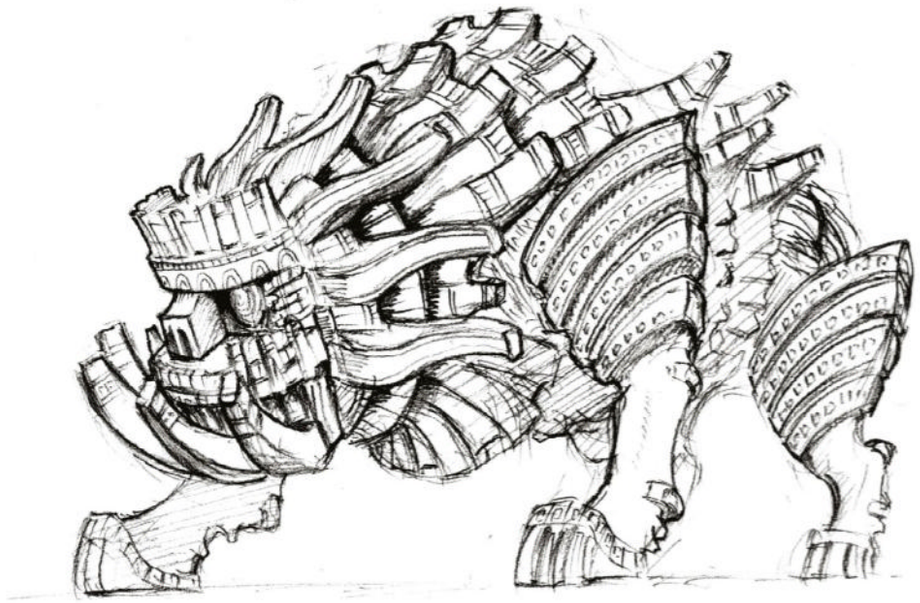
Mount the tail fur and cling on while being dragged underwater. Once it surfaces, make your way up the body and disable the electric spikes.

YAMORI B

■ In the game code, this wall-climber is labelled Yamori B. The Yamori A variant was an abandoned, earlier iteration.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Shoot its legs while it climbs the amphitheatre, knocking it onto its back, then quickly get to the lower level to target its underside.



in remasters and remakes. How did Ueda feel about passing on control of the work? "The [PS3] remastered version was essentially an upgraded version of the original PS2 release, so I didn't feel any particular sense of incongruity," he reasons. A much more significant reworking came in the Playstation 4 era, when Bluepoint fully remade *Shadow Of The Colossus* for the new hardware. "As for the remake, genDESIGN was initially involved in directing it, but with development on *The Last Guardian* becoming busier, I wasn't able to oversee it through to the end," Ueda explains. "Because of that, I'm not very familiar with the finer details of the changes that were made. Still, I feel very grateful that it provides today's players with an environment where they can experience the game."

That gratitude was also felt by players and critics, as the PS4 incarnation received high acclaim for the improvements it delivered in terms of graphics, performance and the control scheme. Joe Houston, a senior software engineer who worked on the remake at Bluepoint, says he was initially surprised when the job came in. "Any time a new contract was coming in at Bluepoint, it could be anything. Bluepoint had already remastered *Shadow Of The Colossus* for the PS3, so I wasn't expecting it at all," he confesses. "At first it was like, 'Huh, we're redoing the game again. What are we going to bring to it that we didn't before?'" Any reservations Joe had were quickly quelled, firstly when he realised that time around a full remake was on the cards, and secondly when he experienced the reaction from fans on its grand reveal at the E3 show in 2017. "We knew our announcement was going to be there and I was very curious as to what the reception would be," Joe recalls. "There was a fade to black from the last trailer and then the tower from *Shadow Of The Colossus* showed. Immediately, everyone went 'wooaahh!' – which was such a bigger reaction than I had ever imagined. It was hype, all the way through. That was the moment when I was like, 'Oh my god, the fans are excited, and it's going to mean something to them.'"

> "SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS REMAINS POWERFUL IN THE SAME WAY A CLASSIC FILM REMAINS POWERFUL"
> **JOE HOUSTON**

Among the people given special thanks in the credits of the remake is Nomad Colossus, whose name is well known in the *Shadow Of The Colossus* fan community. Nomad, whose real name is Michael Lambert, has amassed more than 75,000 YouTube subscribers for his work documenting hidden aspects of original game code. Watching his videos and reading his blogs offers a fascinating insight into parts of the game world that Team Ico created but ultimately made off-limits to players. There is even an achievement trophy dedicated to Nomad in the remake (The Boon Of Nomad), which can be earned by finding a secret cave. Michael tells us he initially became intrigued after finding an existing online community dedicated to uncovering secrets about the game. "There was something special about this group of people who all had the same hope of finding an unknown secret in the game years after it was released. They called themselves 'secret seekers' and put forward all manner of crazy theories in the hopes of uncovering something never before seen," Michael says, before keenly giving credit to those who came before him, including a pioneering player known as Pikol. "There is a fully rendered dam that was found by Pikol that is far outside the bounds of the normal game arena. This was, and still is, the pinnacle discovery in *Shadow Of The Colossus*."

BOSS RUSH

KAME

■ This electric-projectile spewing, mean-faced beast with spidery legs is fast to boot, making it a challenging adversary.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Lure it to a geyser on horseback, then shoot its legs when it tries to balance. Flipped on its shell, you can clamber on and attack.

NARGA

■ In an underground sand dune, this serpentine foe pursues you at speed beneath the surface before rising up to pounce.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

On horseback, let the beast chase you, then shoots its eye when it rises. When it crashes into a cave wall, leap on its back.

LEO

■ The smallest colossus so far makes up for its size by being swift and savage. It charges like a bull, so watch out for its attacks.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

It fears fire, so use a torch to force it back over a ledge. Its armour will break in the fall, leaving it wide open for you to attack.

POSEIDON

■ Another lake-lurker, this gargantuan crab-like colossus rises up out of the water with a fearsome armoured head.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Climb its back, then whack the teeth-like protrusions on its crown to steer it towards a tower. Jump off, hide and leap for its exposed underside.

» [PlayStation 2] Beards, back hair and gigantic limbs are all viable routes to scale your foes.

» [PlayStation 2] Your quest centres around resurrecting Mono, who regains complexion each time you kill a colossus.

» [PlayStation 2] Columns of light mark the locations of colossi you have killed.

» [PlayStation 2] Puzzle-solving skills are needed to start tackling each enemy.

SNAKE

■ The only colossus that will not attack you glides high in the sky above a desert, with its pale underside visible.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Shoot arrows into its underside until it descends, then leap from your horse onto a wing. As it flies, find the weak spots across its body.

CERBERUS

■ Amidst overgrown temple ruins, a small, fast and furious colossus resembling a snarling dog lies in wait.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

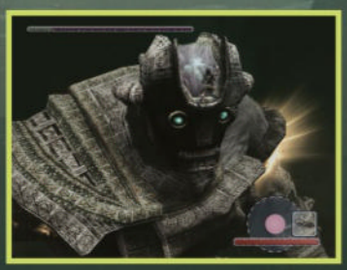
Platforming skills will help here. Leap to higher ground and bait the beast into knocking over columns, until it collapses a roof onto itself.

MINOTAUR C

■ As you cross a seemingly empty plaza, the ground shakes and an ape-like giant clambers up from a valley.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Find loose slabs and provoke the beast to whack them. Then climb up the angled slabs to reach a bridge, and leap onto its body.



EVIS

■ The final battle pits you against an enormous enemy raised high on a podium from which it hurls electric bolts at you.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Dash for cover and use underground passages to get closer. Once you are climbing, make death-defying leaps across body parts to find weak spots.

REMAKING A CLASSIC

JOE HOUSTON ON THE HIGHLY ACCLAIMED PS4 REMAKE

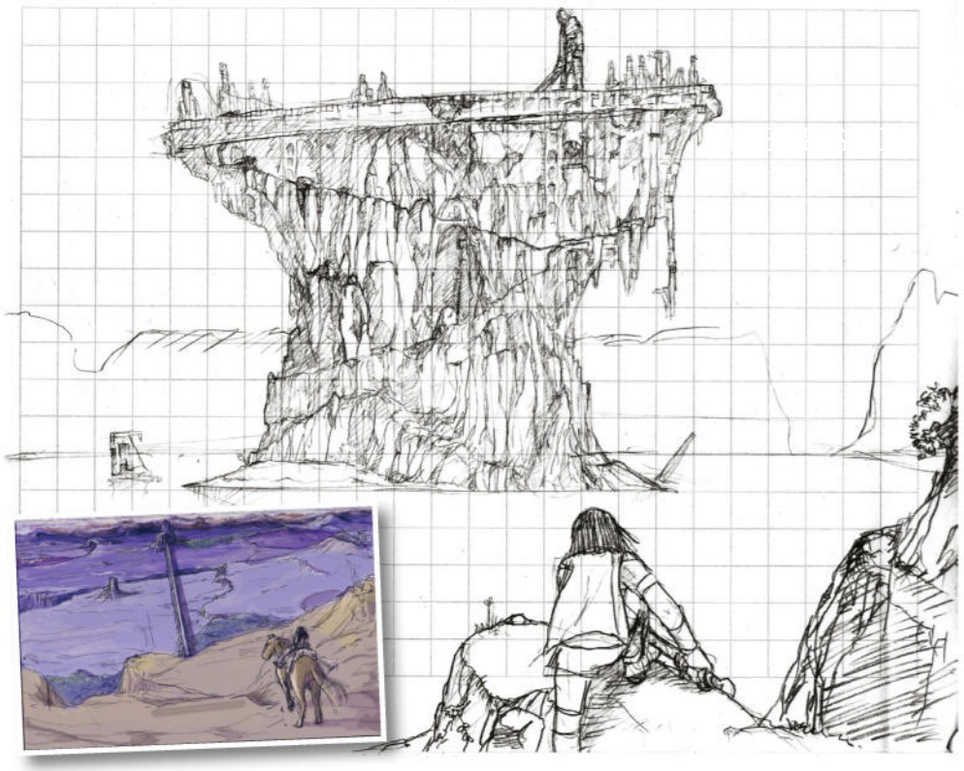
HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING ON THE REMAKE OF SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS?
I was excited. There was some pressure, and that part of the conversation that honestly can't be answered until you're done, which is, "How much is this going to mean to the fans?" I will say that the answer to that question is: I've been working on games for over 20 games, including a bunch of games that are important to people, and *Shadow* is the one I hear about the most, by far.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS FOR WORKING WITH THE ORIGINAL CODE?
We had a mantra at Bluepoint that we wanted to make the game you remember, which is different than the game 'as it is'. The game 'as it is' creates a feeling and a memory. Like if you go back and play the PS2 *Shadow Of The Colossus* today, are you going to remember that it had a terrible draw distance, that the framerate was poor, and that it had a different control scheme to anything you'd play today? Probably not. For *Shadow* as well as other remakes, we'd first get the original game working on modern hardware – a straight port. Then we'd have the Bluepoint engine and the legacy code running in parallel, and there was this interweaving between the two. The old code was always the bedrock, the foundation the remake was built on. It was equal parts archeology and modern game making.

WERE THERE MANY BUGS TO FIX?
Fixing legacy bugs is a big conversation when working on a game like this, because you're taking a swing at the original intent and the way that game was, and sometimes those quirks are held really dearly by gamers. With *Shadow*, it's definitely not up there in terms of logical bugs. The main things that persisted were framerate, [the] unusual control scheme, and visuals such as the fog and draw distance. We felt the fog wasn't by intent, but more a technical limitation. Quite a bit of what I did was modernising the control scheme. That was one that was high risk and high reward.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE SEEING THE RECEPTION?
Hardcore fans of *Shadow* love the remake, and that's great, but new players love it too, which is testament to the original's voice and what is still different about the game in today's landscape. Over the years I've heard, "*Shadow* is my favourite game," that's not us, that's the original game – then they say, "You did a great job on the remake," which is as good as you can hope for.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE GAME HAS SUCH AN ENDURING LEGACY?
Shadow found people at a time when a lot of them didn't realise games could be art, and could give you a complex emotional reaction. It was a growing up phase for a lot of people my age when they realised games could be a hobby, they could be a way of life, they could even be something more. Then on top of that, it's an auteur game, it has a singular vision, it makes its decisions regardless of how you feel about them. It remains special.



On his own findings, Michael notes, "I discovered the lands outside the main peninsula that we call the beta mountains. Before this it was assumed that the mountains and dam were just leftover models that were put to one side and forgotten about, but it's clear they were in their correct areas all along. That is, when you overlay the beta mountains and dam on the world map, you can see how they fit in with the rest of the Forbidden Lands. So there was a much larger vision for the game early on, but due to time constraints and the budget they had to reduce it to its current form." He also recounts using a memory editor to explore a prominent scene towards the end of the game, where a bridge suddenly crumbles beneath Agro and Wander. "I wanted to find Agro after this happened. I 'warped' Wander down below the game's surface only to find the floating pieces of the bridge suspended in the void. Amazingly, these bridge parts were still solid so Wander could stand on them." It has now been 16 years since Michael started data-mining and exploring the game in this way. "You would think after 16 years there would be a point where there was nothing left to do, but that's never been the case. I am always working on a new blog post or video or checking out some new way to change what we can do in the game."

> "IT WAS A PROJECT WITH MANY CHALLENGES, BUT RECEIVING SUCH HIGH PRAISE NOW MAKES ME FEEL THAT ALL THE EFFORT WAS WORTHWHILE"
> **FUMITO UEDA**

The dedication of community members like Michael shows the deep impact *Shadow Of The Colossus* has had on players, just as it has on game developers. Each of the people we interviewed for this article has their own personal story about the game, from Michael being contacted by his YouTube subscribers who grew into adulthood watching his videos, to Joe playing through the remake with his young daughter (who enjoyed riding the horse, but not so much the monster-slaying parts). "*Shadow Of The Colossus* remains powerful in the same way a classic film remains powerful," Joe reasons. "That has to do with the narrative choices and voice of the game. But it's not just a game you watch – it is a game you play, that you interact with, through and through." For Michael, the game, "has a dream-like quality about it. It's art brought to life, digital poetry, another dimension where you can go and lose yourself". So how does Ueda himself feel looking back on the colossal impact of his creation? "In the ever-changing game industry, I'm truly grateful that even after 20 years, the game still remains in the memories of so many people," he reflects. "It was a project with many challenges during its development, but receiving such high praise now makes me feel that all the effort was worthwhile. And I'm sure that feeling is shared not only by myself, but by all the staff who were involved at the time."

We ask Ueda about the eagerly awaited next genDESIGN game, which was announced at the 2024 Game Awards. In the trailer video, a character with a gun can be seen climbing atop a huge figure as a blast wave approaches on the horizon. Can players expect any parallels with *Shadow Of The Colossus*? "I can't go into much detail yet, but in terms of creating a game that I myself would want to play and experience, I think that's something it shares with all my previous works," Ueda replies. "That attitude itself may be the only real common thread." It's a tantalising response that hints at both continuity with, and a departure from, his past works. Given how consistently those works have sparked awe and wonder in players, we can't wait to see what awaits.

» [PlayStation 2] Your steadfast steed, Agro, is your closest companion in the Forbidden Lands.

» Two flying bosses feature particularly prominently in the film's scenes.

HOLLYWOOD PAYS TRIBUTE

HOW THE FILM REIGN OVER ME INCORPORATES THE GAME

In an early script for *Reign Over Me*, the 2007 drama starring Adam Sandler and Don Cheadle, the plot included a generic arcade shooting game. Sandler's character was a man consumed by the loss of his family in the September 11 attacks, and his means of coping was to wrap himself up in gaming. After reading the script, the film's editor Jeremy Roush suggested the alternative of working *Shadow Of The Colossus* into the plot, even going so far as to sit director Mike Binder down for a demo.

In an interview with Kotaku, Roush pointed out that, "You could see where someone who was dealing with 9/11 would be engrossed by a giant that keeps collapsing over and over again." The fact that Sony published both the game and the film no doubt made it easier for Roush to argue his case. As a result, *Shadow Of The Colossus* plays a heavy part in the film, in which it cleverly represents the enormous emotional burden carried by the main character, Charlie. In his *New Yorker* review, journalist Anthony Lane describes how Charlie "likes to sit in his apartment and play a videogame, *Shadow Of The Colossus*, on a huge screen. Over time, we discover the colossus in whose shadow Charlie lurks".

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IN THE KNOW

- **» DEVELOPER:** PETER HARRAP
- **» COMPOSER:** ROB HUBBARD
- **» BEST TRACK:** MAIN THEME
- **» RELEASE:** 1985
- **» PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64
- **» GENRE:** PLATFORMER

» [C64] Rob Hubbard's excellent music for *Monty On The Run* starts with the loading screen.

» Rob Hubbard continues to compose tunes and he also plays music live. "I was quite pleased with the orchestral score that I did which vastly expanded on the basic material," he says.

» [C64] Rob Hubbard's music for *Thing On A Spring* made his name as a C64 composer but *Monty On The Run* cemented it.

BLENDING RAPID ARPEGGIOS, EXPRESSIVE PITCH BENDS AND ROCK-INSPIRED MELODIES, THE MAIN MUSICAL THEME FOR MONTY ON THE RUN TOOK THIS ADDICTIVE PLATFORMER TO ANOTHER LEVEL. ROB HUBBARD DISCUSSES HOW HE PUSHED THE COMMODORE 64'S SID CHIP AND COMPOSED ONE OF THE MACHINE'S DEFINING MASTERPIECES

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

Peter Harrap's surreal, smooth-scrolling platformer *Monty On The Run* was an undoubted masterpiece. It's a tough yet hugely enjoyable jaunt in which players were tasked with guiding a somersaulting, jail-breaking mole to freedom on a cross-channel ferry. The game proved popular on the ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 16 but it was the Commodore 64 version which really caught the imagination of gamers thanks to Rob Hubbard's superb musical score.

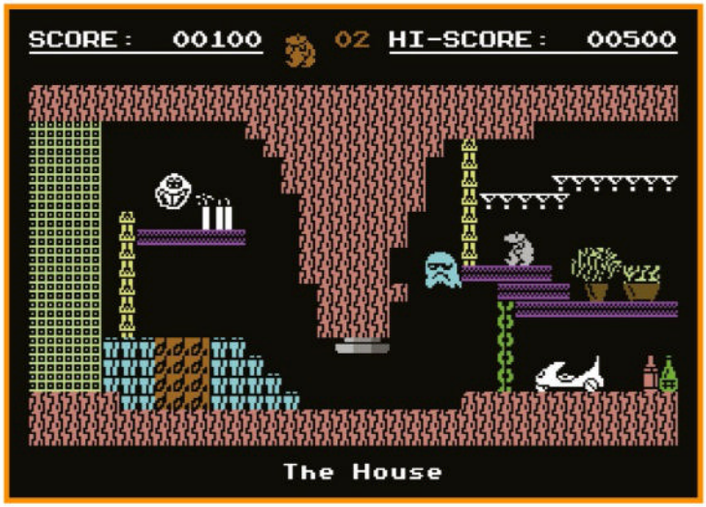
Composed in 1985 when Rob, a professional studio musician, was 30 years old, the game's fast-paced main theme pushed the limits of the C64's SID sound chip. It was based on *Devil's Galop*, a rollicking tune composed by Charles Williams which gained wide admiration when it was used to introduce the radio serial *Dick Barton – Special Agent*. "Gremlin Graphics asked for that *Devil's Galop* tune so I had to do something very similar," Rob says. "But I added my own interpretation and the pace of the game's animation sort of dictated the tempo."

Rob had learned BASIC and machine code a few years earlier. He also learned the Commodore 64 had the best 8-bit sound quality. Using his new-found knowledge, he programmed some music, education software and a game but soon realised his strength lay in composing tunes. As such, the Commodore 64 quickly became the perfect 'instrument' on which he could truly shine and, before long, he realised he would get better audio results if he swerved the use of existing sound-producing utilities in favour of programming his own low-level driver to interface with the SID chip.

"The driver was not written specifically for *Monty On The Run* – it evolved from other earlier games," Rob says. This allowed him to get the most out of his tunes because he could tweak his own utility to suit his growing musical requirements. It also meant he was in full control. "I wrote all my own code and I didn't use any other software apart from the assembler," he affirms. In that sense, the music was entirely his from start to end.

> "I GENERALLY STARTED WITH THE MELODY AND BASS, AND I'D SKETCH THE ACTUAL MUSIC ON MANUSCRIPT PAPER"
> ROB HUBBARD

Given the whole idea was that Monty was seeking to evade the long arm of the law, the idea was to compose an energetic piece that instilled a sense of urgency in the player. Rob approached *Monty On The Run*'s music in the same way as all of his tunes. He would start by playing around with a Casio MT-30 polyphonic synthesiser or a Yamaha DX7. "I generally started with the melody and bass,



» [C64] The Sinclair C5 made an appearance in the game because Gremlin's owner Ian Stewart owned one.

» [C64] Although he was a musician, Rob Hubbard was also an accomplished programmer.

» [C64] *Monty On The Run*'s soundtrack was widely acclaimed by reviewers. *Zzap!64* gave it a whopping 99%.

» [C64] When Rob Hubbard composed the *Monty* theme, he believed he'd taken the SID chip close to its limits.

and I'd sketch the actual music on manuscript paper," he says.

Next, Rob would turn his attention to the Commodore 64. "I used to code a short phrase of four bars and work on that before expanding on the whole tune," he explains. "I composed everything in machine code using .DByte hex statements. Workflow was a case of typing in hex code, compiling it, running it, editing the data and repeating. It sounds awful, but at the time it wasn't that bad, and I used to kind of zone out doing it. Earning some money helped!"

The more he worked on the tune, the more it burst into life. Rob imbued it with violin-like audio and keyboard sounds. There was a guitar-sounding solo that has become so beloved by fans and there were electronic drum sounds that sought to emulate the distinctive sound produced by the Simmons brand – the sound that you'd hear on albums by Duran Duran, Rush, Depeche Mode and more.

Rob also tweaked the driver's code to add pitch bends which were used in the tune's middle section. "Some specific code was added for the guitar-style solo too," he adds. Throw in pitch bends combined with octave arpeggiation which became a hallmark of Rob's tunes and there's no denying it was a complex arrangement that was widely applauded by reviewers and gamers. The effect was an emotional tune that kicked off with an explosive, rapid-fire arpeggio burst before filling the air with a tune that felt as if it was being played by a full rock band, such was the skill in making the most of the three SID voices.

But then Rob was hugely experienced, having begun work in the music industry after leaving school. "I had a strong background working with analogue synths, so I used that to get to grips with the SID chip," he says. "Most of the limitations of the chip were overcome by really thinking about the musical arrangement and working hard to exploit the limitation of three voices. There were a couple of quirks that I found by experimenting: there was an additional waveform you could get by using two waveforms on the SID chip. The other quirks were from the rapid updates of the chip on the VBI. But most of it was done by the actual software that I coded."

Rob would, as many undoubtedly know, go on to compose many more blistering tunes as he gained a reputation for being one of the finest Commodore 64 composers. *Monty On The Run*'s theme, however, has long gone down as one of his best, helping to define an era and still proving capable of thrilling those who hear it.

ANOTHER MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

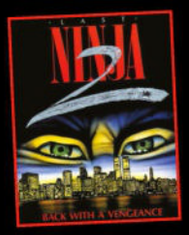
It's not just Rob Hubbard's opening tune for Monty On The Run that sounds amazing…

■ *Monty On The Run* is best known for its blistering in-game soundtrack but there was a second piece of music which played on the high-score entry screen. Far slower than the energetic main theme, its melancholy nature still proved to be highly memorable to the point that some fans believe it to be the finest chiptune of all time.

The reflective feel of this particular tune was intriguing, players would be entering their high score and learning where they were in the leaderboard and yet any feeling of triumph was being tempered by the musical reminder that their successful session had come to an end. Complex and catchy, it was a slice of genius to some degree.

It's also worth pointing out that this particular tune was not unlike the one which accompanied the high score in the run-and-gun game *Commando* released on the Commodore 64 by Elite – another tune composed by Rob.

THE MAKING OF • LAST • NINJA



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3
- **DEVELOPER:** SYSTEM 3
- **PLATFORM:** C64, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

» Mark Cale founded System 3 in 1982 and still runs the studio to this day.

BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

» [C64] Chicken laced with sedatives is the only way to get past the otherwise deadly puma in *Last Ninja 2*

» [C64] Getting through *Last Ninja 2*'s dark room is made trickier by the fact that there's a maze in it!

PLANNED LONG BEFORE THE RELEASE OF THE ORIGINAL GAME, LAST NINJA 2'S MARTIAL ARTS ADVENTURING BROUGHT SYSTEM 3 WORLDWIDE SUCCESS. STUDIO FOUNDER MARK CALE EXPLAINS HOW THE HUGELY POPULAR C64 SEQUEL CAME TO BE

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

By today's standards, Eighties games had relatively short development times, and so follow-ups often appeared hot on the heels of successful titles. System 3's *Last Ninja 2* was something of an outlier in this respect, in so much as it was a foregone conclusion before the original game had even come out. This was in no small part due to the response to a playable preview of *The Last Ninja* and the demand shown for the game prior to its subsequent release, as System 3 founder Mark Cale remembers. "When we created *Last Ninja* we always thought we could continue the adventure, the whole idea of its ending was to leave it open to a sequel," Mark points out. "Our global distributor at the time was Activision, and its phone lines in London were constantly ringing before *Last Ninja* was released with people asking when it was coming out. So we already knew it was going to be a massive hit. A lot of that turned around when we did the covertape demo for *Zzap!64*. When people saw that and realised they weren't fake screenshots they knew it could

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE LAST NINJA (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: C64, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1987

IK+
PLATFORM: C64, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1987

MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING
PLATFORM: C64, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1989

COOL CHALLENGES

THE EPIC ENCOUNTERS OF THE EIGHTIES CLASSIC

COPS AND CRIMINALS

New York's finest are understandably upset to have a ninja on their streets, although arming themselves with shuriken seems like overkill! The big apple's bad guys are equally well armed, so expect them to put up a fight.

ALLIGATOR ATTACK

The final opponent in *Last Ninja 2*'s sewers is a fully grown alligator, presumably banished there when it got too big to be cute anymore. You need a Molotov cocktail to defeat it, and you have to assemble that from parts.

CHOPLIFTER

Originally intended to be set on the Statue Of Liberty, *Last Ninja 2*'s helicopter setpiece instead takes place on a New York rooftop. The chopper doesn't land; you leap off its rope ladder when you reach your destination!

SHOGUN SHOWDOWN

After you enter the shogun's lair you need to unlock a safe with a code to get a sacred bowl, light candles at the points of a pentagram, get the shogun into it and dispatch him with a shuriken. All while fighting him off.

» [C64] Access to *Last Ninja 2*s bandstand basement requires a button to be pressed in another location.

» [C64] You can build nunchucks in *Last Ninja 2* from wooden handled chains found in public toilets.

be incredible. So we knew there would be a sequel."

With *The Last Ninja* being set in a fantasy-inspired feudal Japan, it would have been reasonable for its follow-up to follow suit. Instead, System 3 located *Last Ninja 2* in contemporary New York. This plot twist was explained by time travel and inspired by Hollywood. "We always wanted the series to not just be based in Japan. A lot of that was influenced by *Highlander*," Mark acknowledges. "It was set in different times: you had Scotland back in the day and present-day New York. So we used imagery of New York from books and films to get the look of the townhouse-style buildings and architecture in the game in keeping with the city, and various other elements you would expect to find in New York. Everybody knew what a New York cop looked like because they appeared in many films. So with everything we tried to give an impression of New York."

> "WE ALWAYS WANTED THE SERIES TO NOT JUST BE BASED IN JAPAN. A LOT OF THAT WAS INFLUENCED BY HIGHLANDER"
>
> MARK CALE

While this change of scene did much to differentiate *Last Ninja 2*, more subtle alterations to the original's formula aided this effort. One tweak made getting around the sequel more combat heavy without the foes being tougher. Instead they regained consciousness after getting knocked out. "In *Last Ninja* you could just knock a guy out and move on, so in *Last Ninja 2* it was an evolution of where we were in the original game," Mark considers. "We were adding a few tweaks to make the game flow a little better, and I think having to knock out enemies three times just helped the gameplay. We felt that it was too easy in *Last Ninja* to take out an opponent and that there wasn't enough of a scene. Like I said, it was an evolution. I wouldn't say it was more or less realistic. It was just to give it more gameplay."

Further innovations helped to distinguish *Last Ninja 2*, including dangerous real-life animals to contend with instead of mythical Japanese dragons and city sewers to navigate instead of medieaval dungeons. As with the follow-up's core influence, its menagerie of deadly creatures took inspiration from the silver screen. "We had those because there were all these funny B-movies, like *Killer Bees* and things like that!" Mark exclaims. "There were films with alligators in the sewers too. So they were pop-culture references. It was just accepted that these things could happen in films, so why not put those elements into a fantasy adventure like *Last Ninja 2*? I mean, you wouldn't want more muggers in the sewers instead. Another reason that we wanted to have sewers in *Last Ninja 2* was that a lot of people liked the dungeons in *Last Ninja*, so we wanted a dungeon feel, which was what we got from the sewers."

As well as the sewers, *Last Ninja 2* boasted many other locations associated with New York. Unlike the settings in *Last Ninja*, the routes between these environments allowed for and encouraged exploration and backtracking rather than leading players along a path from opening screen to level exit. "There was more exploration involved in *Last Ninja 2* because the original was in some places a bit too linear, and we wanted to make the sequel a bit more challenging," Mark recalls. "I think there was a reason why people say *Last Ninja 2* was their favourite *Last Ninja* game. It's probably because it had the right balance. You had a little more depth in the adventure of the game, and trying to find things and work things out. People were more used to that style of gameplay by then, so you could be more progressive in how you made the puzzles."

» [C64] The swarm of bees that attack you in *Last Ninja 2* was inspired by the Seventies movie *Killer Bees*.

» [C64] Jaywalking is frowned upon in *Last Ninja 2*, to the point that you get run over if you even try it.

At the same time as being more complex, *Last Ninja 2*'s challenges were also naturally more intuitive to solve, simply because the sequel's Eighties setting allowed for object and obstacle-based conundrums that involved relatable items and impediments. Although an exception was made for one old but still in use device. "We wanted to make the challenges and puzzles far more logical but at the same time more challenging than they had been in *Last Ninja*," Mark assesses. "Players were more familiar with the items in *Last Ninja 2* because they were more modern, like the traffic lights and the nunchucks in the toilets. That puzzle came about because Victorian toilets had wooden chains to flush them that looked like nunchucks, so we thought those would make good nunchucks! Why not?

> "PLAYERS WERE MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE ITEMS IN LAST NINJA 2 BECAUSE THEY WERE MORE MODERN, LIKE THE TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND THE NUNCHUCKS IN THE TOILETS"
>
> **MARK CALE**

That probably came from going into my granny's flat and thinking, 'Oh! That's a nunchuck if ever I saw one!'"

This focus on logical problem solving was continued even with *Last Ninja 2*'s odder challenges, which included constructing Molotov cocktails to throw at alligators and sending pumas to sleep with sedative-laced chicken. However, these seemingly unlikely puzzles had their roots in strange but true facts. "You weren't going to get a sea serpent in the sewers, but if you put an alligator in then that worked," Mark reasons. "Then there were crazy Americans that had pumas in the Eighties that walked down the streets with them in real life, so we tapped into things like that. So there was all of that weird stuff going on in the Eighties, and that was where a lot of the content in *Last Ninja 2* came from. Something that was great about that era was that because the amount of

» [C64] Taking a bottle from a drunk in *Last Ninja 2* doesn't make sense until you reach the end of the level.

» [C64] There are keys that unlock all sorts of things in *Last Ninja 2*, including sewer manhole covers.

» [C64] You don't have to fight all of the foes in *Last Ninja 2*, you can run past some of them instead.

CONVERSION CAPERS

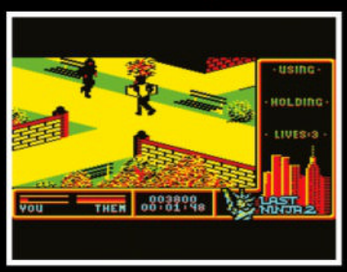
MEMORABLE ADAPTATIONS OF THE C64 ORIGINAL

ZX SPECTRUM

■ The fact that the Spectrum *Last Ninja 2* faithfully replicates the C64 original in monochrome is impressive, but everything being in black and white means you sometimes can't tell where the ninja is. The pre-game tune is beep-y, and there are no in-game sound effects.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The Amstrad *Last Ninja 2* could have used the CPC's 16-colour mode, but instead it's a port of the Spectrum version. It also has the same pre-game music instead of a three-voice tune. The one notable difference is that the border around its play area uses less colours.



BBC MICRO

■ The low-resolution four-colour visuals in the BBC Micro *Last Ninja 2* are a little garish, but they do the job. There are a lot less foes, although those you meet are fast and furious, and some of the original's challenges have been replaced with less impressive ones.

NES

■ It's called *The Last Ninja*, but it's actually a port of the second game. It looks and sounds like the original, but it's more console-like. For example, foes leave you to your own devices unless you get really close to them and you can safely jump from high places to the ground.

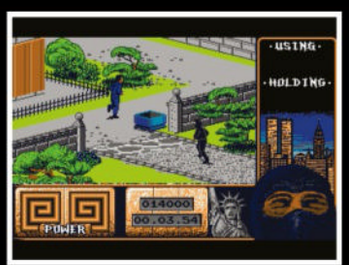
entertainment on offer was limited people would persevere and discover things, or they would read magazines for hints and tips, and then want to follow those."

To further enhance *Last Ninja 2*'s challenge, its weapons were hidden rather than left lying around or being dropped by foes as sometimes happened in the original. But as in *Last Ninja*, the weaponry available in the sequel was strictly limited to what ninjas of old used. "I think ninjas were originally hired assassins," Mark ponders. "They dressed in black and would hide; they had stealth. They would go out and take out a local warlord or whatever back in Imperial Japan. So the idea of a ninja picking up weapons from people that they had taken out was maybe something they would do in real life, but we wanted to make finding the weapons part of the puzzles. We picked the weapons for *Last Ninja 2* because they were what you would find legendary ninja assassins using. So shuriken throwing stars and ninja swords, and daggers and poisons. Those weapons were from history and legends."

On its release, *Last Ninja 2* made some history of its own in terms of its sales, selling over five million copies on the C64 alone. Decades later, its appeal appears undiminished, certainly if the recent *The Last Ninja Collection* Kickstarter is anything to go by. "The Kickstarter went phenomenally well," Mark beams. "I didn't think there would still be that much love for the *Last Ninja* series after so many years. We hadn't done a Kickstarter before, and we didn't know how well it would go, but it got fully funded in 14 minutes or something. The collection has got C64, Amiga and Spectrum versions of *Last Ninja*, *Last Ninja 2* and *Last Ninja 3*. You've got *The Last Ninja Remix* on there, *International Karate*, *IK+*, and you've got *Bangkok Knights*, so it's a fighting collection. It'll also be available at retail, but the limited-edition versions are only available to the Kickstarter backers."

At the time of writing, *Last Ninja 2* is available on PC as part of the *The Last Ninja Collection* with console versions to follow. Reflecting on how well it has aged over the years, Mark gives a modest reply while recognising its impact at the time and players' continuing fondness for it. "I can't possibly judge my own creation," Mark reviews. "All I can say is that everyone has been blown away at us bringing back memories of how great *Last Ninja 2* was. I would say it still serves a part of the market that wants that kind of experience. In its day, it was one of the best games of that era in terms of sales and reputation. In terms of computer games I think there are very few that had the reputation that *Last Ninja 2* did in that era. It's remarkable that it still gives so many people so much fun in today's world on modern formats." ✱

» [C64] You need to have decent weapons by the later stages of *Last Ninja 2* to fight well-armed enemies.



AMIGA

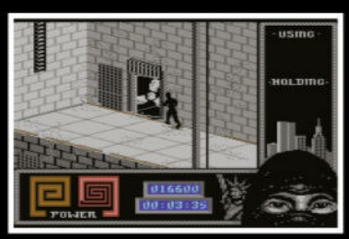
■ The visual and audio capabilities of the Amiga are put to excellent use in this version of *Last Ninja 2*; it looks and sounds fantastic. The enemies aren't quite as dogged as those in the original, which is good, and some of its setpieces are depicted in more detail.

ATARI ST

■ The Atari ST adaptation of *Last Ninja 2* is identical to the Amiga version in terms of graphics and gameplay, so the only aspect to compare is the ST's music and sound effects. These are good given the system's hardware, but they fall short of those in the Amiga iteration.

PC

■ It's let down by its pre-game tune and in-game sound effects, but the PC version looks as good as the Amiga version. Some of its foes look different, but all of them are as aggressive as those in the original, and they have the best weapons from the first level onwards.



» [C64] A powerful rooftop fan near a steep ledge is just one of *Last Ninja 2*'s tests of timing and dexterity.

» [C64] The skyscraper platforming challenges in *Last Ninja 2* are not for those with a fear of heights.

» [ZX Spectrum] Bearing down on a well-protected Seiddab cruiser, to try and liberate the Spica sector.

CRASH #89

THIS MONTH IN JUNE 1991

The Spectrum was still full of life in the summer of 1991, with games aplenty in the mag, and the Sam Coupé seeming to offer a glimpse of the future. The covertape wars were raging and *Crash* offered readers two tapes, including eight full games, along with a demo and a hatful of Pokes. One included the massive space adventure *Astroclone*, along with *On The Run* and several other goodies. The other had classic Codemasters budget titles, with eggy adventure *Dizzy* joining *BMX Simulator* and *Fruit Machine Simulator*, although burglary platformer *Phantomas* sadly failed to load for us.

» [ZX Spectrum] Various enemies patrol the Seiddab bases, droids in this case.

THE MAIN EVENT: ASTRO CLONE

Astroclone is an early Graftgold classic by Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook, published by Hewson. Following on from the Seiddab trilogy that began with *3D Space Wars*, it screams epic from the start, its *Space Odyssey*-inspired loading screen setting the tone for an ambitious game that puts you in charge of an entire galactic conflict, and the fate of the human race.

There's space combat, strategy and adventuring and you'll need them all to triumph over the evil Seiddab (baddies spelled backwards), an army of long-slumbering space robots who've awakened and set their sights on Earth. The strategy screen lets you deploy ships to different star systems. From there, you can pick a system to attack and battle enemy star cruisers in the space-combat screen.

This section is the highlight. It starts with a few asteroids, but things soon ramp up. Hordes of enemy drones and fighters are out to harass you, but battling through those and taking down your first enemy starship is a glorious moment. Win or lose, the explosions are spectacular.

Wipe out all the enemy ships, and you've taken the star system, though some systems have a base that also needs to be dealt with. Cue the ground-combat mode.

This takes the form of an arcade adventure, with you guiding armed clones to fight and

THE SPECTRUM HAD BUILT UP A MASSIVE LIBRARY OF SOFTWARE BY 1991 AND THERE WAS PLENTY OF CHOICE FOR MAGAZINE EDITORS LOOKING TO FILL THEIR COVERTAPES. FOR LUCKY CRASH READERS, THIS MEANT TWO PACKED OFFERINGS, WITH EIGHT WHOLE GAMES TO CHOOSE FROM, IN THIS MONTH'S COVERMOUNT CORNER

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

» [ZX Spectrum] The enemy ships are relentless, and you have limited reinforcements, so be careful.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Astroclone* spans many star systems. You're in for the long haul, assuming you survive.

» [ZX Spectrum] The loading screen promises a space epic and *Astroclone* absolutely delivers

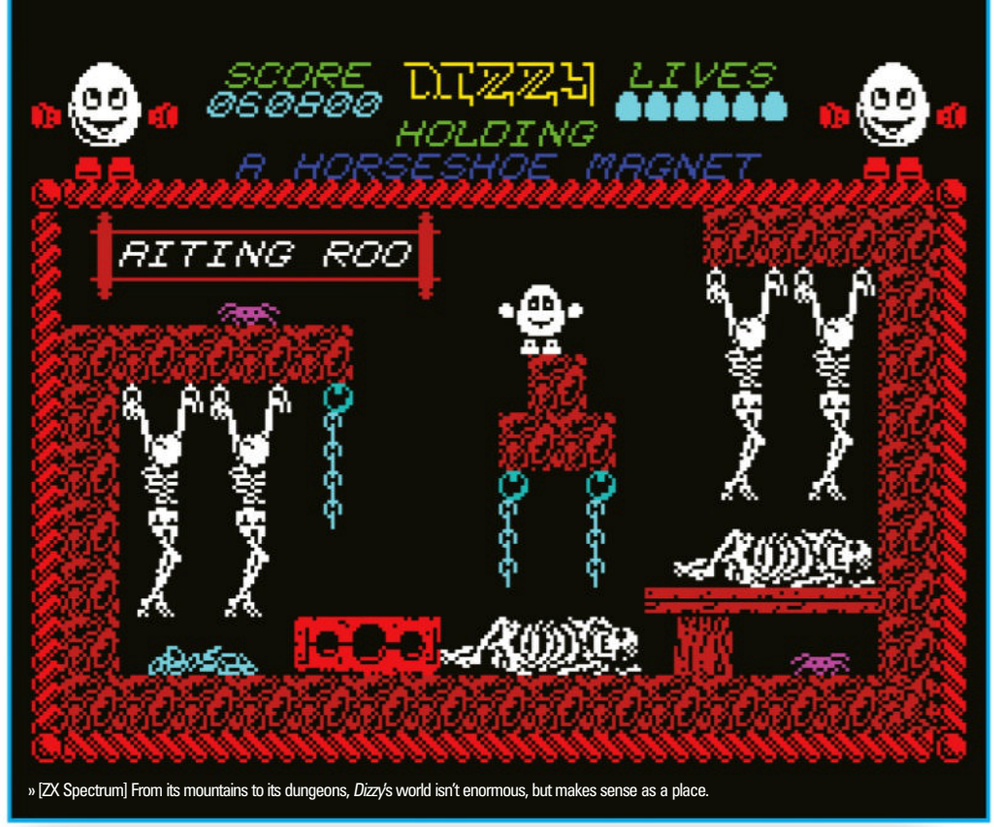
puzzle your way through the bases. Drawing on previous games *Avalon* and *Dragontorc*, the bases are quite sizeable which, along with a slightly clunky inventory system, makes this section the most challenging.

The combination of styles leaves the game as very much more than the sum of its parts though, and while tough, *Astroclone* is a unique game that's well worth experiencing.

PLAY THIS NEXT: DIZZY

This classic from the Oliver twins spawned an entire series of games that even got a new entry a few years ago. Dizzy, the heroic egg, stars in a solid arcade adventure, filled with platforms and puzzles. You're on a quest to gather potion ingredients to destroy an evil wizard and free the land of Katmandu. Each of the beasties that block your path has an item that can permanently destroy it, which lets you gradually clear the screens of the most tricky nasties.

Although it features an annoying collapsing bridge that makes the game impossible to complete, *Dizzy* remains a highly enjoyable platformer and its success led to a large number of sequels and spin-offs.



» [ZX Spectrum] From its mountains to its dungeons, *Dizzy*'s world isn't enormous, but makes sense as a place.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

BMX SIMULATOR

■ A muddy, single-screen racer with obstacles and ramps to avoid and exploit. Brutally difficult in solo mode, but an awesome battle of skill and cunning with a friend, this was a perfect post-school game to enjoy from Codemasters.

SOCCER CUP QUIZMASTER

■ This covertape exclusive by Scope Design lets you battle your way to cup final glory by answering trivia questions. They're not too tricky, but there are timing challenges to complicate things, along with penalties, cards and free kicks.

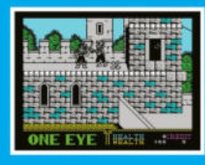
ON THE RUN

■ This is an entertaining action adventure from Design Design, which plays like a cross between *Jetpac* and *Sabre Wulf*. As hero Rick Swift, you jet around hunting missing chemicals. Unfortunately, the local wildlife has mutated, and is out to stop you.

SEA BATTLES

■ This *Battleships* variant by Robert Bradshaw adds land units to the classic game. Though basic, and rather slow to set up, it's a good, tense interpretation once it gets going, despite only catering for a single player.

SKULL & CROSSBONES DEMO



■ This demo of Domark's swashbuckling arcade conversion lets you try the game's Spanish castle level, where you trade cutlass blows with guards and archers. There's treasure to dig up and an evil wizard at the end. It's short, but a lot of fun.

FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATOR

■ Another Codemasters budget game recreates the pub favourite, as you pump 10Ps into the machine in the hope of winning a virtual fiver. Ideal for kids who couldn't play the real thing, you can practically smell the beer mats as its loading screen appears.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG SPIN-DASHED HIS WAY INTO OUR HEARTS MORE THAN THREE DECADES AGO. IN TRIBUTE TO NICK THORPE, RETRO GAMER MAGAZINE'S BIGGEST FAN OF THE BLUE BLUR, WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE GAME THAT FIRST INTRODUCED SEGA'S MOST ICONIC CREATION TO THE WORLD

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

» [Mega Drive] New obstacles that were thrown at the player came at a pace as fast as Sonic himself.

» [Mega Drive] A lot of effort went into animating Sonic to help give him a bit more personality than that plumber.

» [Mega Drive] These Chaos Emerald stages were a trippy spin (literally) on the platforming of the game.

» [Mega Drive] Those loops were a technical challenge, but they added a lot to the feeling of speed.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Be honest with yourself now, just how much did seeing Sonic here on these pages trigger a rage in you? We gamers are a loyal bunch, and for some retro gaming fans there's an allegiance that sits at the core of our very soul. For some of you (and you'll know who you are) just the mere sight of the blue hedgehog is enough to recall playground squabbles over the early days of The Console Wars. Whether you align yourself with Nintendo's plumber or the (significantly) cooler Sega urchin, the point is that Sonic has for decades been not only the face of Sega but the spirit mascot through which we filter out the good people from the bad. More significant than Xbox vs PlayStation, more storied than *Doom* vs *Quake*, more emotional than Horde vs Alliance, the rivalry between Sonic and Mario sits within most of us veteran gamers.

And it's not really by chance, either. From the very early days of Sonic's inception, before he was just a blinking blue blur in Sega's eye, the developer and console manufacturer was out to get Mario dead

» [Mega Drive] The combination of the colours, the music and that ready-to-run hedgehog. This was *the* Mega Drive showcase.

» [Mega Drive] That satisfying 'pop' and a bounty of bunnies and birds escaping captivity; it told the player their goal without needing to say it.

"SEGA WANTED A CHARACTER THAT EMPHASISED A SENSE OF SPEED"

to rights. Even early on in the project's development, the codename of *Defeat Mario* set the tone for exactly what the intention was to be achieved here. Initial development had some of the iconic elements of what we know about the original game already in place, from the fast pace of the game to its memorable loop de loops. While that core gameplay was appealing, Sega wasn't on board with the characters or world that it was attached to. At the same time, the company set a competition internally for its teams to come up with the next videogame mascot, a character that Sega could use to bring down Mario and take a stab at claiming the American market that Nintendo still hadn't dominated like it had in Japan.

From the offset Sega wanted to emphasise a sense of speed with the game, and so it was vetoing any designs from animals that wouldn't ordinarily be associated with a knack for zippiness. Prior to Sonic, a design based on a rabbit was most strongly up for consideration and even had a gameplay mechanic whereby the character could use its ears to navigate or to throw items around the screen. While this did come with technical constraints, Yuji Naka (who was then only one half of the team on the project) felt like this mechanism too strongly deterred from his overarching goal of a game solely about a sense of speed and agility. ▶

SONIC'S GREATEST MOMENTS

THE MOST MEMORABLE PARTS OF THE ORIGINAL GAME

LOOP DE LOOP

Green Hill Zone is meticulously built to thrill the player with its speed and spectacle, and no better is that encapsulated than the first time you race around a loop. Hands up if you also didn't quite make it the first attempt?

BECOMING INVINCIBLE

Much like Mario's Star power-up, smashing open a box and sparkling with invincibility is a moment of table-turning joy. The first time it happens and you realise you can literally speedrun your way to the end of the level is genuinely elating.

JUMPING A SUPER RING

The massive ring that appears at the end of an act only does so if finishing with 50 or more rings, which on your first few attempts might not actually happen. So the first time you see it, you'll likely rush right past it without expecting to see anything.

SURVIVING UNDERWATER

Labyrinth Zone remains one of *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s most iconic stages, and mostly for the dread-inducing timer that counts down, giving you five seconds to get some oxygen into Sonic's lungs. Surviving that mad dash for a bubble of air never gets old.

CLAIMING A CHAOS EMERALD

Even if you do manage to get into one of those giant rings, managing to survive these rotating, disorientating bonus stages is a whole new challenge of its own. The first time you eventually manage it is particularly rewarding, but did you ever get all six?

DOWNING ROBOTNIK

There's one last little test after beating the final boss fight, but you need to act fast. As Robotnik tries to escape, you cannot falter; leap up and give him one last smack and cause him to crash-land to earth. Either that, or he'll escape as Sonic gazes on helplessly.

» [Mega Drive] Green Hill Zone had been bright and bouncy; Marble Zone was tonally the opposite.

» [Mega Drive] The idea of collecting rings as a safety net for losing a life was kind of ingenious.

» [Mega Drive] Light puzzle solving featured only in this zone. It wasn't *Sonic*'s strong suit, so it didn't stay around long.

» [Mega Drive] All those springy pads were fun at first… until you found yourself stuck in a bouncy loop.

» [Mega Drive] If you know how to access this room, you're a Sonic veteran and we love you for it.

» [Mega Drive] These sections were fun little challenges of timing and precision.

It was Naoto Ohshima, the other half of the team, who eventually came up with the character of Sonic, though known more formally at the time as Mr Needlemouse. Ohshima even travelled to New York to gauge public interest in a variety of character designs. Here he waited in Central Park with the designs, silently noting down reactions from passers-by without explanation. Sonic rose to the top, consistently being recognised as the most captivating. The American audience had unknowingly made its decision, Sonic was to be the game's character and future mascot of the company. And conveniently it had given us the villain of Dr Robotnik too with another of Ohshima's designs, the "angry man", noted as the second most popular.

Sonic's design was built around several key factors. His spiky hair gave him an iconic silhouette while adding to the slick sense of speed. His small round body, inspired by Mickey Mouse's, helped with the spin-jump attack mechanic that was already being considered. Even pop culture worked its way into Sonic's look, such as the buckles of his shoes brought over from Michael Jackson's outfit on the album *Bad*, or their red and white colouring being taken from Santa Claus due to the jolly gift-giver's global fame. And while the hedgehog started life as a teal colour, eventually he was swapped for a Sega-blue to bring him in line with company branding.

BOSS RUSH

MAKING AN OMELETTE BY BREAKING A FEW EGGS

EGG WRECKER

■ Robotnik's first maniacal machine is simply a large swinging orb with which to squish Sonic. Super easy, barely an inconvenience.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Simple really, hop from one platform to the other making sure to not get smashed. You can even fit a couple of hits in at once and it doesn't take too long before Robotnik turns tails.

EGG SCORCHER

■ Making the most of Marble Zone's fiery pits of lava, here Robotnik sets platforms alight that would surely burn Sonic's sweet kicks.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

In many ways similar to the first battle, though timing is more critical here. Give the Eggman a thwack, then leap across the lava as the fire begins to disappear.

EGG STICKER

■ With a large protruding spike at the bottom of his Egg Contraption, Robotnik intends to skewer the blue blur this time.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Stand still to get Robotnik to lower his machine, then quickly move out of the way to bop him once or twice. Don't take too long, that spike takes the platform with it.

"NAKA HAD BEEN HELLBENT ON MAINTAINING A SENSE OF FAST FLOW THROUGH THE GAME"

All this energy was put into creating a character that could go toe-to-toe with Mario, and while Sega Of America had its doubts that Sonic could hold up in the market, all the signs were positive early on. But it wasn't only about marketing and brand image. Sonic had to have an attitude that would stand out, but it was equally important that the game itself would be a winner. This is why speed had been so important, and why Naka had been so hellbent on maintaining a sense of fast flow through the game. The Mega Drive's capacity for faster processing than the Nintendo's SNES was its edge, and while this blast processing would be a part of the marketing around the console it was a huge contributor to *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s game design, too.

Naka programmed a way for Sonic's sprite to smoothly position itself on a curve, and from there it led to more natural movements through ramps, curved level tile pieces and those iconic loops and twisting tunnels. This turned the levels themselves from static platforms to jump from a la *Mario* into more flow-state parts of the level, gameplay mechanics to make use of.

» [Mega Drive] Though visually it was shown as a concerning thing, this fast-flowing freeride was a lot of fun.

» [Mega Drive] Labyrinth Zone was about three things: traps, pulley systems and trying to escape water.

SONIC GOES 8-BIT

THE PORT THAT BROUGHT THE HEDGEHOG TO THE MASTER SYSTEM

The Master System port of *Sonic The Hedgehog* isn't just a scaled-down rework of the Mega Drive classic, it's effectively a different game altogether. Developed by Ancient Corp, the studio cofounded by game music legend Yuzo Koshiro, this 8-bit *Sonic* needed to offer its own take on speed and level design. Gone are the loops and breakneck slopes, replaced instead with tighter platforming and a larger focus on exploration.

Much of the original makes its way over, from the Badniks and overall goal of the game. The physics are gentler and jumps more precise but still with that one-button approach of the base game.

There are other differences, too. Zones are reworked, while Bridge Zone and Jungle Zone are completely new and make the most of the expansive, exploratory layouts. Chaos Emeralds are still present, though found within the stage rather than as bonus levels and boss fights had to be reworked entirely. While it couldn't have matched the Mega Drive equivalent, it was still a worthy release.

» [Master System] The levels had to be redesigned, but they retained the aesthetic and music of the base game.

EGG MOBILE

This time around Robotnik rather hopes to witness Sonic die in a gruesome manner by simply waiting for him to drown as the water rises.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

If you're quick enough you can destroy Robotnik's machine here for extra points, but really all you need to do is make it out of the platforming gauntlet before the water rises.

EGG SPIKER

Inspired by the spiked seesaw springs inside Star Light Zone, Robotnik now uses explosive spikes to try to detonate Sonic from above.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

It feels trickier than it actually is. Just watch the pattern of when Robotnik drops a spike and then simultaneously jump onto the opposite side of the seesaw to launch the bomb.

EGG CRUSHER

At the heart of Robotnik's headquarters, here Sonic faces him without his flying machine… and using large pistons to crush the hedgehog.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

There's two parts to it. First, avoid the orbs of energy by leaping through the largest gap between them. Then, as the pistons move up, get out of the way. If you can, hit Robotnik inside one of the pistons.

» [Mega Drive] These tiny fans are capable of a surprising amount of force, able to keep even Sonic back.

MUSIC MASTERY

HOW THE ICONIC BEATS OF SONIC WERE CREATED

Nothing was going to bypass Sega on its mission to defeat Mario, so even the game's music had to be ramped up to 11. The goal, therefore, was to fit the game with a soundtrack that was so much more than the usual midi beeps and boops.

Sonic Team had something specific in mind and so it reached out to the bassist and songwriter of a band called Dreams Come True. Masato Nakamura had been inspired by the team's dedication to take on Nintendo, and so he set about creating melodic tracks and then transposing them into digitised versions with only four sounds playable at once.

But it wasn't an easy task for Nakamura, who hadn't any experience making music on computers and hadn't even seen the stages he was writing the music for. Instead, all he had access to was concept art for the stages, and so set about creating a soundtrack based on mood alone. *Green Hill* was upbeat and bouncy; *Star Light* was soft and calming; *Scrap Brain* was mechanical and hard.

It was then sound engineers Hiroshi Kubota and Yukifumi Makino who brought the audio tracks into the game, though they could not be correctly named in the credits due to a Sega policy and as such are named as Jimita and Macky.

» [Mega Drive] If you're anything like us, you're currently humming the title tune.

» [Mega Drive] The player had to progress from lush island landscapes and tribal mazes to cityscapes and a gritty industrial complex.

» [Mega Drive] You definitely don't want to rush through this zone. Take your time, a mistake would be deadly.

As the internal team in Sega known as Sega AM8 grew (nicknaming itself Sonic Team which was adopted officially later on), other members started to add their influence. Hirokazu Yasuhara was brought in as lead designer and was pivotal in the one-button philosophy towards the gameplay, matching Miyamoto's approach towards *Mario*. It was Yasuhara that turned Sonic's jump into a spin attack, combining the actions of platforming and attacking into a single button press. This improved the game's accessibility, which was undoubtedly important for its later success.

> "THE BLUE BLUR HIMSELF WAS A FLASH OF ATTITUDE"

Yasuhara was pivotal in the design of the levels, too, which is arguably where *Sonic* was most able to stand apart from the *Mario* series. The underlying goal was to encourage a sense of perpetual forward momentum for the player, but each stage was still built with some degrees of exploration and platforming in mind. Even Green Hill Zone, which was essentially the high-octane intro to *Sonic*'s pacey gameplay, had a range of opportunities for the player to take off the beaten path or navigate with a more careful, considered approach. From there Marble Zone switched tact to something slower paced and more platformery; Spring Yard Zone had its ruckus of bounce pads and rolling ramps; Labyrinth Zone had its infamous difficulty spike, while Star Light Zone eased off the brakes a bit to let players enjoy a couple of final speedy laps. Then there was Scrap Brain Zone, the last challenge of the game that tested the player in every way.

Was *Sonic The Hedgehog* able to succeed in its goal to defeat *Mario*? Well, if we look at the landscape now you'd have to say no, but when it was released in 1991 the game and by virtue the blue blur himself was a flash of attitude that was able to bring Sega and its Mega Drive crash-landing into the fight with Nintendo. The game was packaged in with purchases of the console, kicking out *Altered Beast* and bringing *Sonic* into multiple millions of homes worldwide. Sega was ready to pounce on *Sonic*'s success, so from there the phenomenon grew, spanning multiple sequels and spin-offs, comic books and TV shows, a plethora of toys, Lego sets and merch and of course the popular movie trilogy. The playground arguments might have shifted to something a whole lot more modern, but the fact that Sonic The Hedgehog is still an icon to this day shows just how important his very first game really was.

» [Mega Drive] That fear of not finding oxygen was even more prevalent in this section of Scrap Brain Zone.

» [Mega Drive] Don't let that rotund animal abuser get away, Sonic!

» [Mega Drive] And if you manage to collect all six Chaos Emeralds throughout the game…

» [Mega Drive] …you'll be rewarded

PLAYING SONIC TODAY

WELCOME TO GREEN HILL ZONE!

Given the popularity of the Mega Drive *Sonic* games, it's no surprise that Sega has made them available everywhere it possibly can. For accessibility sake, the best option would be *Sonic Origins* on PC and consoles, a bundled package of the three original Mega Drive classics, *Sonic CD* and 12 Game Gear *Sonic* games. It's a remastering and does come with a host of extras like missions, unlockable modes or the chance to play as Tails, Knuckles and even Amy in any of the original games, but if you can, skip the modern nonsense and play them in Classic Mode with smooth 60fps gameplay.

For purists wanting the authentic 1991 experience, Nintendo Switch Online's Mega Drive app offers the original ROM with save states and a rewind function. It might feel like heresy to be enjoying *Sonic* on a Nintendo console, but it preserves the classic slowdown quirks and timing and so makes it ideal for players who want the unfiltered version.

For something even more authentic, you could shop around for original hardware and a cartridge, which can be found fairly inexpensively, though there is a rigmarole on getting it set up on modern TVs. If that's an issue, consider tracking down a Mega Drive Mini; it's not so readily available but it comes with original-like controllers and is bundled with 42 classic MD games, including *Sonic 1* and *2*.

» The box art for the Mega Drive Mini cleverly apes the original console box.

» [PlayStation 5] *Sonic Origins* is a solid compilation that includes plenty of challenges in addition to numerous games.

John Madden Football

THE DIGITAL TOUCHDOWN KING

» MEGA DRIVE » 1990 » PARK PLACE PRODUCTIONS

I've never been good at sports. As a youngster my puny frame and lack of coordination meant that I'd rarely get picked to play football and I always came last in any events I took part in during sports day.

The irony of course, is that while I'm rather naff at sports in real-life, I do enjoy playing simulated versions of them, from *Pro Evolution Soccer* and *NBA Jam* to *Virtua Tennis* and *John Madden Football*. In fact, my interest in American football largely stems from first playing the game on a friend's Mega Drive.

Although I'd occasionally seen the odd game on late-night TV, I didn't understand American Football at all at the time, and when my friend first suggested playing it, I politely declined and said I'd watch them play against the computer instead. Fortunately, my friend was a good teacher and the game itself was quite intuitive, so much so that when I reluctantly agreed to a game, I managed to hold my own and only got beaten by a couple of touchdowns.

It's easy to see why *John Madden's Football* left such an impression on me. Visually it's very good with detailed, well-animated player sprites that are easy to follow, even when a lot is happening on-screen. The game's presentation is excellent as well and it's easy to select plays and navigate the game's various menus.

Most of all it's just a huge amount of fun and what it lacks in true authenticity it makes up for with solid mechanics, fast-paced plays and challenging AI opponents. As with many sports games, *John Madden Football* really comes into its own with a second player and we'd often end up playing a match whenever I visited.

While I've not kept up with the series in recent years, I'll still play the odd game now and then on my Mega Drive and it still holds up remarkably well. If only my current friends liked it as much as I do. *

MAGAZINE CRAFT

RICH PELLEY

From the world's wackiest games magazine to the industry's mainstream breakout in the late-Nineties, freelance writer Rich Pelley has been penning jokes and reviews since 1989. Retro Gamer caught up with him to chat about Your Sinclair, Amiga Power, Arcade and more

Words by Graeme Mason

THEN

Rich began as a freelancer for *Your Sinclair*, writing jokes and reviews in line with the magazine's anarchic nature. With his feet under the table at Future Publishing, he guested on multiple other Future publications, most notably *GamesMaster*, *Super Play* and *PC Format*, while holding down regular stints on *Amiga Power* and *Arcade*.

NOW

Rich continues to write to this day, carving a niche in the late-Nineties as a celebrity interviewer for a range of magazines and websites. For the last 17 years, he's mainly been trying to avoid getting punched in the face while asking celebrities ridiculous questions for *The Guardian* and *The Observer*.

» [ZX Spectrum] Inspired by Crap Games Corner, the annual Crap Games Competition continues today. What a legacy.

How did you get interested in journalism?
When I was at school, they introduced activities for students so they didn't have to do sport twice a week. And one of them was magazine production, which I did when I was 13 or 14.

Did this get you writing?
Yes – I wrote a fanzine about Spectrum games. There was a games shop on Henleaze Road in Bristol, and the owner just let my mate and me come in and play the games without buying them. I'd typeset it all on my Spectrum, and had this publishing program that let you print it out. Then I'd queue up at the staff room and get this poor teacher to do all my photocopying. My dad would also go into work early and do some photocopying, and I think about five people read it!

> "I had to review some compilation, and got paid 35 pence per word"
> RICH PELLEY

Aww. But it had one particular benefit…
Because I did the fanzine, I noticed another chap, Jonathan Davies, was doing one too. He went to another school in Bristol, and we became friends. Then he won a competition in *Your Sinclair* for his fanzine, and got a job at Future Publishing after it bought the magazine from Dennis Publishing in 1989. Jonathan introduced me to the editor, Matt Bielby, and I got a job freelancing for *Your Sinclair*.

Tell us about your Spectrum fanzine.
Someone else at school was doing a sort of punk music and skateboarding type fanzine. And there was another famous skateboarding fanzine in Bristol, which they laid out on wrapping paper-like backgrounds. I nicked that idea and got into the layout, and the joy of creating a magazine as much as playing the games. I remember I did one issue where you got a free teabag, because all the Spectrum magazines had started putting things on the cover.

We can imagine your mum wondering where all the tea was! What was your first gig for *Your Sinclair*?
I had to review some compilation, and got paid 35 pence per word. I thought, "Oh my God, I'm loaded!" It amounted to £300 in total, and I went and bought a stereo. It was bonkers. I hadn't even done my GCSEs. Jonathan was doing his A-levels, we used to meet up, hang around and swap Spectrum games, then all of a sudden I'm working for *Your Sinclair*.

With your exams incoming, it must have been a busy time for you?
I've never worked so hard in my entire life! I was writing for *Your Sinclair*, *Amiga Power* and *Zero* while doing my A-levels in Maths, Chemistry, Physics and Art. It felt like I was doing seven A-levels! I carried on freelancing throughout university.

Did you go to *Your Sinclair*'s offices much?
During the [school] holidays, I went and worked in its offices. When I was in sixth form, I didn't have any lessons on a Monday morning, so I just about had time to catch a bus, get the train to Bath, walk into school in my school uniform, and give them the disk with my copy.

In addition to reviews, you also worked on *Your Sinclair*'s tips section.
I got a bit of a reputation for doing the things no one else wanted to do. I was widely associated with the tips for a long time. I'd get a massive bundle of readers' letters sent to my house

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Stormlord II
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Fighter Bomber
Rainbow Islands
Zombi
4th Dimension
Beverley Hills Cop
To name but a few!
Uh oh! Seems like your Smash Tape's come a bit unstuck! Better check with the shopkeeper to see if he knows where it is! (Perhaps he's keeping it safe behind the counter or something?)
Plus! Compos! SAM Disk Drive Review! And More!
SMASH TAPE No 29
The Future Starts Here

» *Your Sinclair* issue 52, the first from Future Publishing.

» Rich Pelley on Titus' *Wild Streets*, "Sorry, I just don't like it."

once a month. I hadn't played a lot of the games, so if two readers wrote in and said the same thing, I assumed it was true!

Did you enjoy writing the tips section?
I quite liked it because *Your Sinclair* was so fun to write for – you could just write a load of nonsense. No one wanted to do it, so I thought, let's make them fun, with loads of jokes.

You soon found yourself in an unexpected role too...
When *YS* first moved to Bath [under new publisher Future], they hadn't yet figured out how to take screenshots. Subsequently, you'd plug the computer or console into a Mac and press Space to take one. But then I had the job of photographing the TV screens connected to the Speccy, with an actual camera under a blanket. That's why the screenshots of the first issue to come out of Bath are so blurry.

Did you meet the full-time people at *Your Sinclair*?
I made friends for life there. The first time I met Robin Alway, he was wearing a Blue Aeroplanes T-shirt [a Bristol post-punk, alternative rock band that's still active today – Music Ed], so we shared a love of music and have been friends for decades. Jonathan Davies, of course, and Matt Bielby, both good friends. I was much younger than everyone else; they were in their early 20s, and I was just 15. But I remember we'd go and play baseball in Bath Park in front of the Royal Crescent, and then I'd go down the pub and be drinking pints – at 15!

» Reviewing budget games in *Your Sinclair*.

What did your folks think of all this?
No idea! I think they were secretly impressed. I never had to ask for any pocket money because I had a job. Also, I didn't know what to do with it all. I once hung £300 worth of pound coins on the Christmas tree for my younger brother – we still talk about it to this day.

Many fans see two versions of *Your Sinclair* – the Dennis one and the Future one. Would you agree?
It definitely had two very different forms, with people like T'zer [Teresa Maughan], Phil South and Marcus Berkmann involved before it moved to Bath. Some people definitely think it went a bit childish when Future took over, but I don't know. I think we ran with the humour and did the same sort of thing from the start.

You're perhaps most well known for *Your Sinclair*'s Crap Games Corner.
It started with Duncan MacDonald, who was a staff writer on the mag while it was still at Dennis. He reviewed this game, *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator*, which was a terrible game where you could only move the lawnmower left and right, and it would randomly break down. And then the next ▶

» When Rich stole Jonathan Davies' girlfriend. A true story. (Not a true story.)

My FAVOURITE COVER

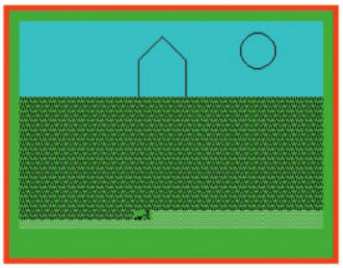
ARCADE ISSUE ONE

"The one with Lara Croft on the cover. The cover line went 'The new face of videogames', and everyone went, 'No, it isn't, it's Lara Croft!' Then, inside, there's a picture of me in a house, eating pizza in front of a sofa with some girls on it. It's an advert for the magazine, and it helped make that issue quite exciting."

I REMEMBER WHEN

NO ROLL-UP, THANKS

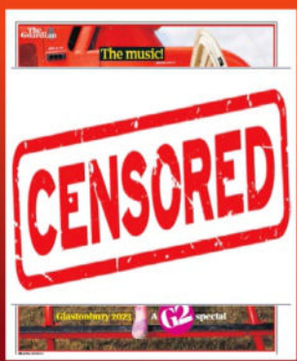
"Andy Ide from *Your Sinclair* offered me a roll-up back when you could smoke in the office – I was only 15! I thought they were horrible, and said no thank you very much!"



» [ZX Spectrum] The game that started it all: *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator.*

MY PROUDEST MOMENT

"My proudest moment was when I was on the cover of *G2* [*The Guardian* newspaper's pull-out entertainment supplement], dressed in a pair of gold hot pants pretending to be Elton John," notes Rich. "I noticed all the photographers were sniggering, but I've got this superstition of not wanting to look at the photo. So, I just saw it when it went to print at *The Guardian*, on the front of *G2*, and you could clearly see the outline of my… y'know. This was in the national press!" Not quite what we meant by proudest moment, Rich…



I REMEMBER WHEN

THE INTERNET? PFFT!

"When Matt Bielby launched *.net* magazine after *Arcade*. Everyone was saying, 'The internet's never going to take off, why are you doing a magazine?'"

month, they put it on a covertape, and loads of people started sending in their own versions, causing Matt Bielby to wonder why we didn't start reviewing them all. In *Smash Hits*, they used to have a section called Crap Corner or something, and I stole that and made it into Crap Games Corner.

> "I think publishers hated us" — RICH PELLEY

Then, because people liked me slagging off the games, they began writing the crappest games possible, and sent them in with little notes trying to persuade me to review them. I remember the art editor, Andy Ounsted, was famous for riding a motorbike, so someone wrote a 'version' of the Sega game *Hang-On*. But nothing happened, you just went along the road, with no turning, in its own little world. It was brilliant. A lot of the games were pretty impressive considering teenage boys had written them in their bedrooms, but the joke soon took over that the crapper they were, the better. Mind you, I'm sure I used to make up half the games from Crap Games Corner in my head.

And it helped to inspire the Annual Crap Games Competition, which continues today.
I wrote about it for *The Guardian* recently. It's a combination of Crap Games Corner and Cascade's Cassette 50. So, yeah, I had a hand in that.

Were you involved in *Your Sinclair*'s covertapes at all?
Not really. I might have written the instructions a couple of times. I can remember playing *Batty* for the first time – I couldn't believe *Your Sinclair* gave it away for free. [Neither could I – Ed]

CRAP GAME CORNER
Fasten your seatbelts and get ready, 'cos here comes that RICH PELLEY ruffian again with another batch of your home-grown games.
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF RICH PELLEY SIMULATOR
By Andrew Johnstone
ANDY 'STREETHAWK' OUNSTED'S CRAP BIKE SIMULATOR
By D Sheera
BIG JOBBY
By Mark Ledbourne

» The crap games section regularly featured games that made fun of *Your Sinclair* writers, including, inevitably, Rich Pelley.

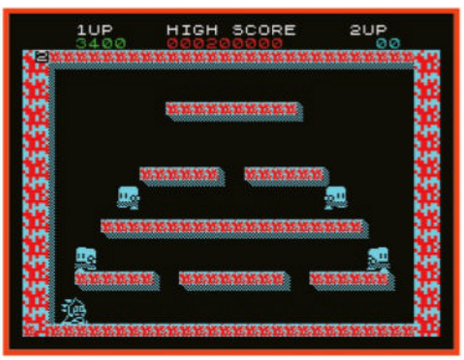
What did you think of the two other big ZX Spectrum mags, *Crash* and *Your Sinclair*?
We just thought they were rubbish. Which they were.

Moving swiftly on… *Your Sinclair* wasn't above making fun of its own writers, including your predilection for flares…
[They weren't] really flares, more baggy jeans, because it was 1989 and I was really into the Baggy scene with The Stone Roses and Happy Mondays. It is true that I later got my mum to take them in.

***Your Sinclair* eventually folded in 1993, but by then you'd already started freelancing for other Future mags.**
I had a Spectrum growing up, and then bought an Atari ST for word processing. I was earning what seemed like a lot of money and giving away a lot of it before my dad took me to Currys to buy an Amiga so I could write for *Amiga Power*. I also worked on *Zero* for Dennis.

How was working on *Amiga Power* different from *Your Sinclair*?
It seemed a bit more grown-up because the games were more expensive. But also, as a journalist, it was that time when there was loads of money in the industry, and if you got to go on a press trip, the game got a higher mark. *Amiga Power* was very against that. A game would get 91% or 92% in other mags, and we'd give it 45%. PR people would come down to Bath and take us out for lunch. We'd go! But it wouldn't sway us. I think publishers hated us. Over on *PC Format*, I once gave some *Star Trek* game 50% – I'd completed it, and it was really boring – and I got lots of angry letters from *Star Trek* fans, and the PR man wanted to kill me.

Ah, a day in the life of a videogames journalist! What did you do on *Amiga Power*?
Jonathan [Davies] started doing the tips before they gave them to me. I also wrote an Agony Aunt-style column where readers would write in with their problems. I did a lot of nonsense.



» [ZX Spectrum] One of Rich's favourite Speccy games, *Bubble Bobble.*

Hard Drivin
Simon
Neil
Rich
Mark
Matt
It looked like Mario Kart would be a Neil victory, until, in a moment of supreme over-confidence, he took a corner too tight, spun, and sailed right off the edge of a cliff...

Going back to *Your Sinclair*, I was in a photo love story. I stole Jonathan's girlfriend. When you're a freelancer, you're often given the stuff no one else wants to do. I also famously sank my mum's car on the beach at Weston-Super-Mare. Don't ask. I foolishly told someone at *Amiga Power*, so I got a massive reputation for that. And apparently, I used to shout on the phone, so every time I was quoted in *Amiga Power*, it was in capitals. To this day, I think I shouted on the phone once!

Why do you think *Amiga Power* is so fondly remembered today?
I recently gave a talk at *The Guardian* with some *Amiga Power* employees I hadn't seen for decades, to a sold-out crowd that wanted us to sign copies of *Amiga Power*. I think it was because it felt like you were a part of a club – we had famous and constant letter writers such as Stuart N Hardy and Isabelle Rees, and it was just a thing you could really interact with. By the time it went, it had gone on for far too long than it should have done – there were just no games getting released any more. Cameron Winstanley wrote a four-page feature on the John F Kennedy assassination, just to fill space. But it had that mentality, like it was your mate.

During the Nineties, you also freelanced for *GamesMaster* and *Super Play*, right?
GamesMaster was a nightmare because it had so many screenshots and boxouts. You'd have to play the game, review it, and then play it again for the screenshots. But it was great fun to work on. On *Super Play*, I had to write about the first *Mario* game on the Super Nintendo. I needed to do tips on how to complete it, plus press Space for screenshots. And there's this one bit where you have to fly under a ghost bridge – I think – and it's really hard to do.

» [ZX Spectrum] Another Pelley fave from his *YS* days: *Dizzy*.

My controller had teeth marks where I kept messing up and biting it!

After *Amiga Power*, you got your only actual employed writing gig – on *Arcade* magazine. What was that like?
I remember congratulating all my mates when they started work on 18 grand or something. I started at six and a half in 1995! I would work on Arcade from ten till six, then I'd freelance from six to midnight. I did that for three years, because that's what everybody did, and you got to work on everything. So I also worked on *GamesMaster*, *Sega Power* and *Super Play* at that time.

How did they prise you away from the freelance life?
I was headhunted out of university. James Binns phoned my student house, and another bloke called Rich answered the phone, accepting the job for me. So I walked straight out of university, went on holiday with my girlfriend, travelled for a few months and went straight back into a job. It was my first office job, and I was still almost the youngest, in my early 20s.

My BEST PRESS TRIP

UP AGAINST THE BIG BOYS

"I remember once we had to go to Manchester to play games with some WWF wrestlers I'd never heard of, but were obviously very famous at the time," Rich tells us. With wrestling videogames popular – especially *WWF War Zone* – Rich and fellow writer Mark Green headed up to Manchester, lugging with them a hefty widescreen TV on the train. "We sat down and played wrestling games with actual wrestlers from the game. And they were… quite big. And a bit baffled. Basically, I think they just liked being there." The three wrestlers – Faarooq, Bradshaw and the distinctly odd Mankind battled with and against the two lads, often confusing controls, their teams, and the difference between videogames and real life. "Er, Rich? Do you think Mankind's going to hit us if we beat him at the N64 version?" mutters a nervous Mark at one point. "Oh, no," replies Rich, "I'm sure all WWF wrestlers are actually lovely people at heart. They probably wouldn't hurt a fly… have a seat on the sofa, here. Mr Mankind. Sir."

I REMEMBER WHEN

THE EARLY DAYS
"When I first started, they didn't even have desktop publishing [software], and everything had to be sent off to the typesetters."

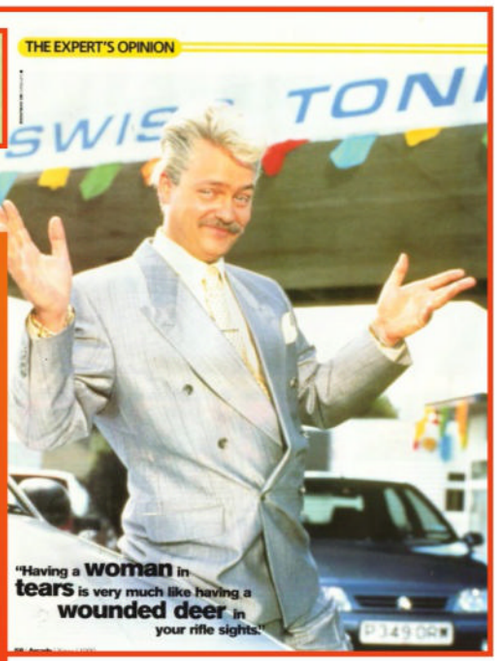
Rich Trousers' Pelley Erm, yes. Rich, what exactly were the problems with your promising new outfit? "Um, well...um." is that it? Come on, you can tell us! "Oh, all right. Um, well, we fell out a bit." (Silence.) Yes, go on. "Well, Jon and Jock were really into being one of those 'three blokes who can't sing, can't dance but look quite chirpy' bands, except we'd be 'two blokes and one girl who...'" Yes, yes, we get the picture! And...? "Well, I wanted to be more like the Stone Roses, you see. Look, I've got the flares." Yes, very nice too. "So I'm going solo." Does your 'fit' explain why the other two don't appear in Jugglers this month then? "Yeah, they're relaunching themselves as some new girl/boy pop duo. They're called Dollop."

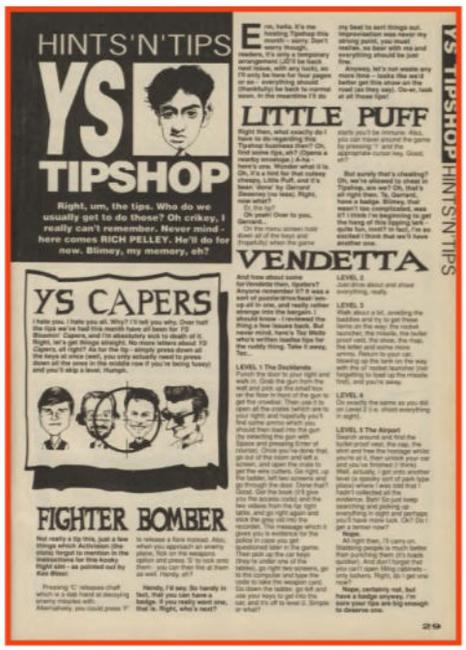
» Immortalised as one of *Your Sinclair*'s Joystick Jugglers.

My BEST INTERVIEW

WHEN RICH CHATTED TO SWISS TONI

Rich's favourite interview is an odd one, in that the person he spoke to doesn't actually exist. Debuting in 1994, Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson's *The Fast Show* revitalised comedy, introducing a range of instant catchphrases and characters. One of the most memorable was the sleazy second-hand car dealer, Swiss Toni, and Rich 'spoke' to him for a feature on the PlayStation game, *Gran Turismo 2*. "I interviewed him about cars, obviously," says Rich, "and all his answers were like, 'Driving cars is very much like making love.'" Rich plugged away, asking Toni (actually *Fast Show* cofounder Charlie Higson) for his opinion on cars, videogames and the internet, each with the inevitable comparison to the fairer sex. "It was brilliant, and it cemented a whole working relationship that I've repeated in every magazine since. But the first time was in *Arcade* magazine. For some reason, he said yes, and I sent him a load of Nintendo 64 games." Swiss Toni even made it onto the cover, with a familiar quote.





» Taking the reins of *Your Sinclair*'s tips pages, and not looking too happy.

This was around the time of the rise of mags such as *FHM* and *Loaded* – did they influence *Arcade*?

Absolutely. The editor, Neil West, was very keen for me to focus on the lifestyle aspect. I would go off with the photographer and do all these crazy jobs. When the Sega Dreamcast was launched, we hired a van with a generator for a TV and a Dreamcast in the back. We just drove around the country, getting people to play it. We also went to a hedgehog sanctuary to see whether hedgehogs could really do loop-the-loops. We didn't actually try to get them to do it, but we were talking to hedgehog people and asking whether the hedgehogs were really fast or friends with foxes.

Did *Arcade* mark a change in the perception of videogames, and changing demographics?

I disagree with you over Great Britain losing its Greatness as you stated in Pssst in issue 53, because...
1) Great Britain has got the best mag in the world – *YS* (of course).
2) We helped win World War I and II.
3) We are a nation of intelligent dudes.
David Possee
Thornhill, Dumfriesshire

Explain these then...
1) Simon Bates
2) Little And Large
3) Margaret Thatcher. **Ed.**

SMILEY

I was reading *YS* 54 and I noticed that in Joystick Jugglers all of the Jugglers were smiling except Rich 'Trousers' Pelley. I read in an encyclopedia that it takes 14 muscles to smile but 43 to frown. Also, Rich looks as though he has just got out of bed. This makes sense, because as he uses up so much energy in frowning he obviously wears his muscles out faster than you or Davey, and therefore needs more sleep. I'll finish with a poem.
Rich does not
Smile a lot,
Like Davey or Matt –
I really hate that!
Chris Embery
Leyland, Lancs

Come on now. Be fair. Like you said, it takes 14 muscles to smile and 43 to frown, and do you know what Rich was doing while that portrait was being drawn? His face exercises, that's what. He's got the strongest, most highly-trained face in the country and can bite through solid granite. And did I mention the control he has over his ears and eyebrows? No, thought not. **Ed.**

ALMOST HUMAN

I have recently bought a SAM Coupé. I read the instruction manual until the bit where it says "The SAM Coupé prefers similar working conditions to you". "Great!" I thought. So I made it a cup of tea

» Rich's name appeared frequently in the *Your Sinclair* letters pages.

FHM was instrumental, and it was also when computer games, particularly the PlayStation, went from being a bit nerdy to massively mainstream. At the time, the *Official PlayStation Magazine* sold something like half a million copies, more than *Loaded*, making it one of the most-read magazines in the country. And we used to joke it was because of the coverdisc, and that you could just put it on a piece of cardboard and it would sell just as well. Everything suddenly became massive, big business, and games were cool. And I think that's what *Arcade* was.

What was it like having to commute?

I walked to work. I remember it took 11 minutes, but I used to think it was miles away because other people lived four minutes away. I often went home at lunchtime and had a bath, which seemed an opulent thing to do. I did some washing, listened to music, had beans on toast and went back to work.

***Arcade* only actually lasted for two years. What happened?**

I think it cost a fortune to make because it had so many words per page. It wasn't the same sort of slightly nerdy gang mentality that *Amiga Power* had. People were buying loads of consoles and games, but they didn't necessarily want to read a magazine about it, or they would just buy the *Official PlayStation* mag 'cos it came with a disc.

Was this the start of a shift away from videogames for you?

I interviewed a Bond girl [Maria Grazia Cucinotta, *Arcade* Issue 15, Xmas 1999] just because she was in a *Bond* game. It was in-person on the *James Bond* set, and it gave

I REMEMBER WHEN

CAMERA SKILLS

"At *Your Sinclair*, we didn't have a Mac where you just pressed Space to take a screenshot – we had to do screenshots with a real camera."

» Rich rounds up his views on 1994 for *Amiga Power*.

» Rich's famous *Battletoads* review for *Amiga Power*.

Profile
Maria Grazia Cucinotta
She plays Cigar Girl in The World Is Not Enough, has spread the word on Tetris in film circles and likes nothing better than to get up to no good in the kitchen (sigh).

» By the late-Nineties, Rich was getting the taste for interviewing celebrities.

» A new generation, but the same, crazy style for *Amiga Power*.

AMIGA POWER
The End
And behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.
NO SECOND PRIZE
FULL GAME
REVIEWED...
Alien Breed 3D2
Kick Off '96
Brian Lara '96
Humans 3

» Rich was involved with *Amiga Power* right up until its final issue.

» *Arcade* magazine shared aspects of lifestyle mags like *FHM* and *Loaded* and ran for two years.

» Rich contributed to *Super Play* and *GamesMaster* during their heyday.

me a taste of not writing about games and not writing games tips.

What did you do after *Arcade*?
I moved to Australia with a mate for a year. I walked into its equivalent of the *NME* and said, "Hello, I'm a journalist from England," and I somehow got the job of British music correspondent. So suddenly, I was interviewing people like Peter Hook from New Order. I pitched loads of ideas to another magazine, *Loaded* in Australia, and the editor liked the one where I wondered what would happen if you ate nothing but McDonald's for a month. I always say that was my idea! Then I came back to England, and just swapped back to *NME* and *Loaded*.

Presumably, back freelancing?
Yeah, it gave me this thick skin, got me used to rejection, and also seemed like I was getting paid to muck around, which was brilliant.

Having worked on so many different games magazines, can you tell us what time period was your favourite?
Random people still say to me, "Are you Rich from *Your Sinclair*?" It's like your first album, it's the one everyone remembers. It just had that feeling of being part of a gang. There was so much more to [*Your Sinclair*] than Spectrum games… it was full of in-jokes, jokes, jokes that were funny, jokes that weren't funny. It was always an exciting day when the latest issue appeared on the shelves. I write for *The Guardian* today, and I can guarantee that in the comments below each article, at least one person will say, "Not Rich Pelley from *Your Sinclair*?"

Glad to hear I peaked in my teenage years! Oh, and have you managed to interview Gwyn Hughes and Rachael Smith for this too (nudge nudge wink wink)? ✱

Our thanks to Rich for his time.

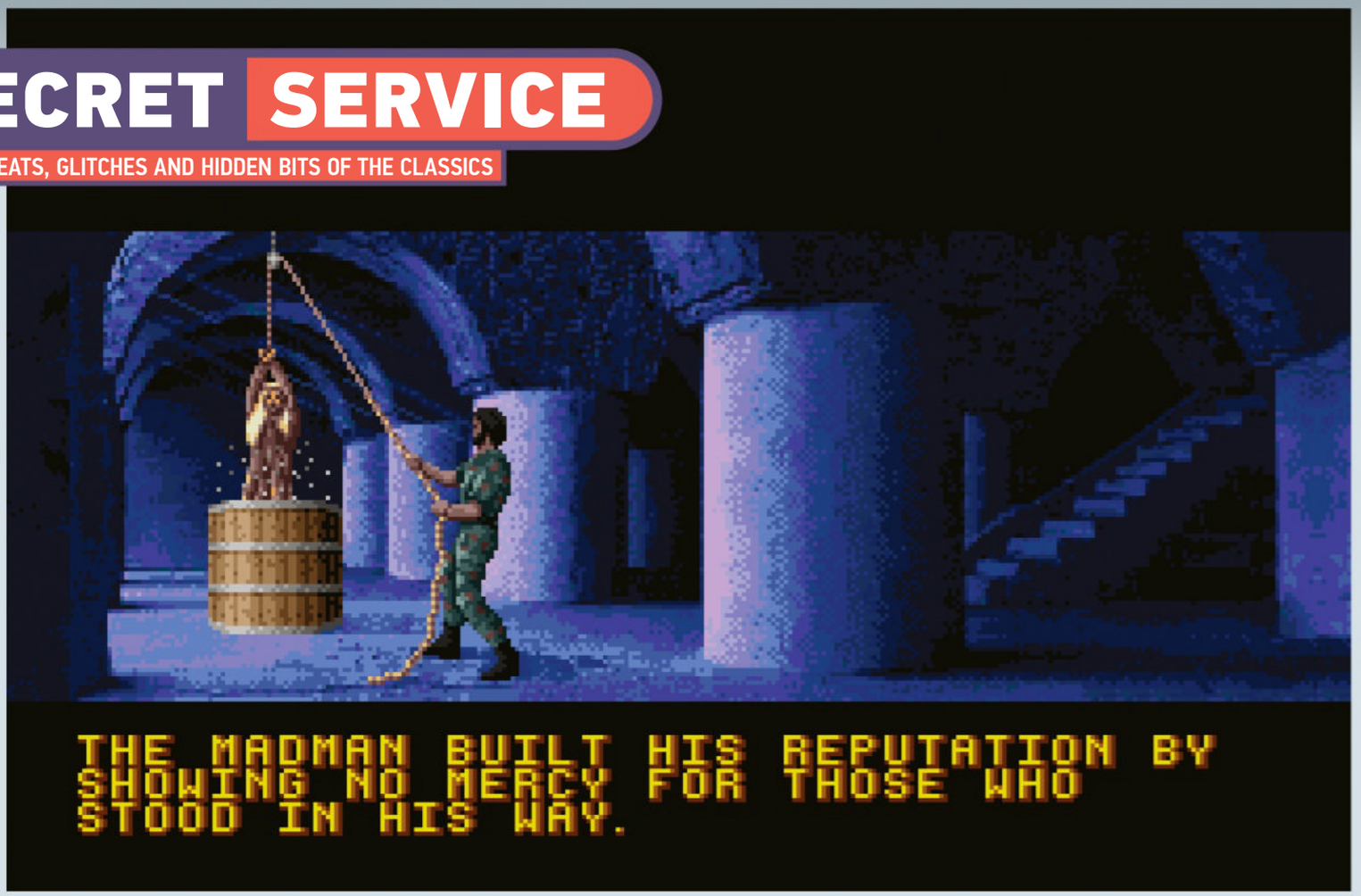
> "I would work on Arcade from ten till six, then I'd freelance from six to midnight"
> RICH PELLEY

I REMEMBER WHEN

CREDIT SARNIES
"There was a lady who'd come round the *Arcade* offices, selling sandwiches on credit. She'd let you borrow up to about 30 pounds!"

SECRET SERVICE

THE CHEATS, GLITCHES AND HIDDEN BITS OF THE CLASSICS



DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS » **RELEASED:** 1992 » **CHEAT TYPE:** HIDDEN STORY » **CHEAT COMPLEXITY:** VERY EASY

While *Desert Strike* is a very story-driven Mega Drive shooter, thanks to the mission instructions you're given at the beginning of each stage, you may not realise just how movie-like the game is.

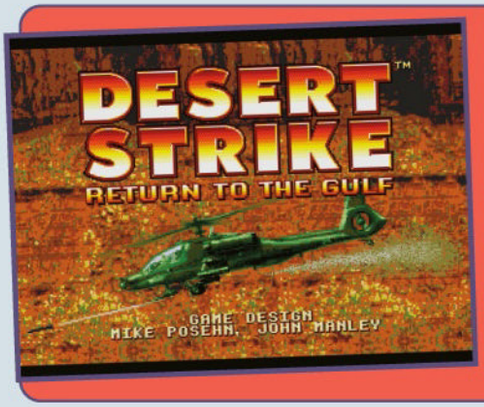
Typically when the game boots, pressing Start takes you into the game and to a simple mission briefing that explains your objectives and how to complete them. However, if you press the **C** button on the title screen you'll instead be taken to a surprisingly good cinematic sequence that sets up *Desert Strike*'s story.

This short cinematic features the despotic terrorist leader General Kilbaba torturing people by submerging them into pools of water and hilariously slapping one of his subordinates who is worried that Kilbaba is taking things too far. It finishes off with a reporter revealing that the President Of The United States is sending in a chopper to sort things out.

This sequence is actually available by simply waiting on the title screen while the game's credits run, meaning you don't actually need to do anything to enjoy it. Still, if you are the impatient type you can now immediately jump to it.

LESLEY MANSFORD
EANN REPORTING LIVE
THE PRESIDENT HAS ORDERED THE SPECIAL FORCES' BEST CHOPPER TEAM TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION.

MORE CHEATS TO TRY OUT

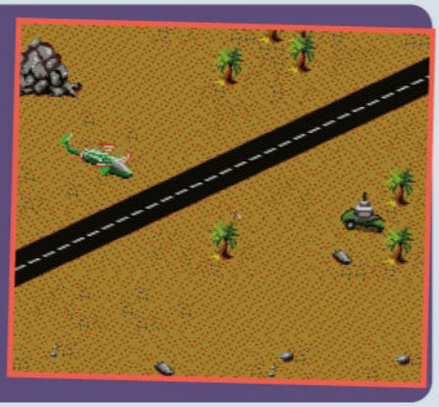


FIRE AWAY

The Mega Drive opening features the game's attack chopper, which fires off a few missiles before ceasing fire. If you want to continue raining missiles down as Rob Hubbard's excellent score plays, you can do it by simply pressing **A** on your controller.

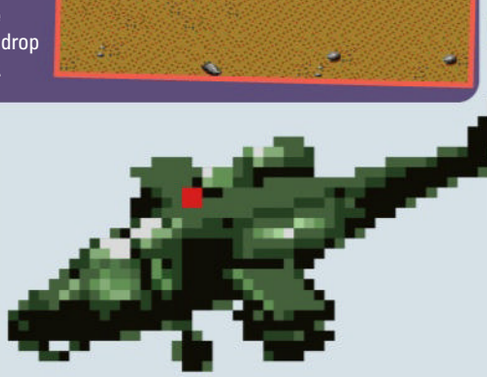
INFINITE FUEL

In addition to worrying about ground units, you also need to keep an eye on your fuel. In the Master System version you can type **NLOFODS** on the password screen, which gives you infinite fuel. It's worth noting that when playing the Mega Drive version your fuel won't drop while flying over water.



ALL THE LIVES

Desert Strike isn't the easiest game so make things more manageable by typing in **BQQQAEZ** on the Mega Drive's password screen. **BS9JS27** gets you the same amount of lives on the SNES, while inputting **BS9JS27** gets the same number for the Game Boy Advance version of the game.

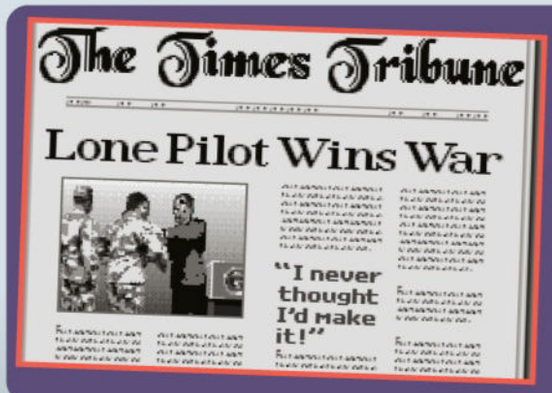


MORE WEAPONRY

If you're fed up with running out of missiles, we've a useful cheat for you. Head to the Amiga's password screen and type in **HARDCASE**. This simple cheat grants you infinite Hydra and Hellfire missiles, but will significantly lower your armour. Shoot them before they shoot you!

SKIPPING CAMPAIGNS

If you're too lazy to complete *Desert Strike*'s campaign this password will do some of the hard work for you. Head to the Mega Drive's password screen and enter **BTOBKLW** to be taken to Nuclear Storm. Now you just need to manage the last few levels. Aren't we nice?



INSTANT ENDING

If you're far too lazy to even play the last campaign, this simple password will show you the game's ending. You'll need to be playing the Game Boy Advance version and you just need to type in the code **F9N5CJ8**. Start the game as normal for credits and the ending.

THE MAKING OF GOAL!

THE ARCADE FOOTBALL GAME KICK OFF SPAWNED A MINI-INDUSTRY OF ITS OWN, WITH SEQUELS, DATA DISKS, CONVERSIONS ACROSS MULTIPLE FORMATS AND A FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT SPIN-OFF. HOWEVER, THE DESIGNER AND PROGRAMMER DINO DINI HAD MUCH BIGGER GOALS FOR HIS NEXT PROJECT

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON

IN THE KNOW

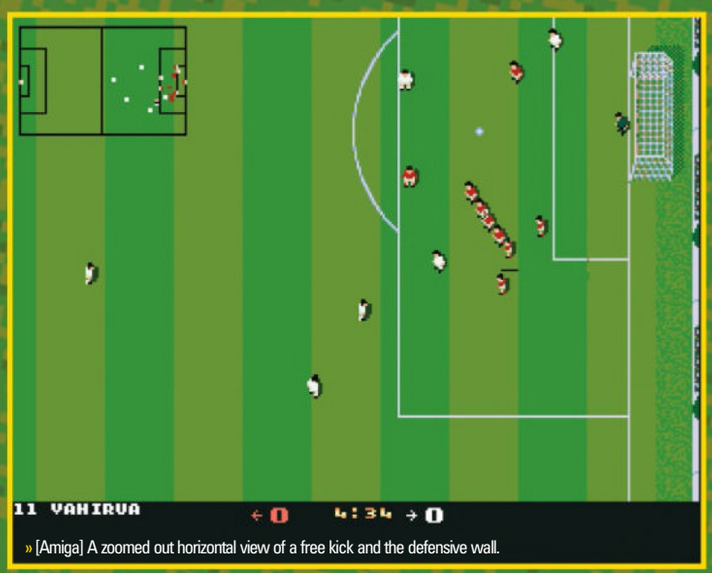
- **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** DINO DINI, CHRIS SAWYER (PC)
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC, MEGA DRIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** SPORTS

In 1992, Dino Dini was at a crossroads. The *Kick Off* phenomenon had given him the confidence to seek more control over his future projects, and the decision to finish working with Anco was a necessary move. Having already left London for the countryside of East Anglia with his young family, why did he also decide to part ways with his publisher? "I'd started development on *Kick Off 3*, but I overheard Anil Gupta talking to another developer who also had a football game," admits Dino. "I asked Anil about loyalty, and he said he owed me none. That's when I decided to take my game elsewhere."

The original *Kick Off* was released by Anco in 1989, followed in 1990 by *Player Manager* and the even more successful *Kick Off 2* later that year, with a handful of data disks that added extra functionality and team data released afterwards. This made *Kick Off 2* a comprehensive and feature-rich experience, so what was planned for Dino's new football game? "I wanted to get around the limitations of *Kick Off* in terms of control of speed, so that you could pulse the stick to move slowly and have more control of the ball at slow speeds but still be able to run fast when you chose to," explains Dino. So, a new and improved control system was in the works, but the new game was never going to be called *Kick Off 3*, as that brand belonged to Anco. It was also not going to use any of Dino's previous code.

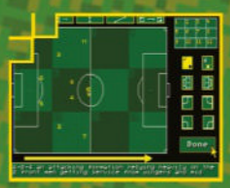
"I wrote *Goal!* from scratch mainly to overcome a limitation with flat state machines, which is what *Kick Off* used," begins Dino. "It's a bit like trying to write a program in a language that does not have functions or subroutines. Things get complicated and repetitive very quickly, so I invented co-routines for myself and used these for the behaviour of the players and the game systems."

Dino also wrote a new user interface. "Making the UIs for the game was a huge time drain so I needed to improve things." Once written, the new method allowed Dino to spin out menu options with relative ease, which was a huge time saver as the game featured dozens of choices for the player to navigate. *Goal!* also had several new features, including a horizontal side-on view and a zoom in-out option. "I really didn't



» [Amiga] A zoomed out horizontal view of a free kick and the defensive wall.

» [Amiga] Comprehensive game statistics were available at half-time and after a match finished.

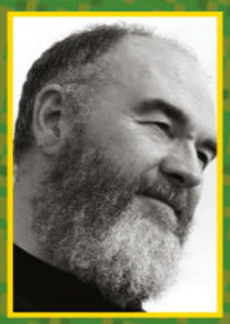


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KICK OFF
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, AMIGA
RELEASED: 1989

PLAYER MANAGER (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, AMIGA
RELEASED: 1990

KICK OFF 2
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, AMIGA
RELEASED: 1990



DINO DINI

■ The pioneer responsible for two Golden Joystick Game Of The Year awards, Dino is now a technical director at Sumo.

» [Amiga] A great goal, but where was the defence to stop the striker from scoring?

» As well as the instruction manual and disks, *Goal!* came with a free football fanzine.

» [Amiga] Even zoomed out, a horizontal muddy pitch still looked muddy in patches.

» [Amiga] The wet pitch had a running track around the outside.

» [Amiga] More options than you could wave an offside flag at.

want to do horizontal pitches because of the false perspective, but it was a feature that lots of people were asking for," admits Dino.

Despite his reluctance, having the choice of a vertical or horizontal pitch turned out to be a great addition that made *Goal!* stand out from the crowd. Another significant decision that Dino made was to seek some representation to smooth the process of finding a new publisher. "When I made the decision to drop Anco, I prepared a demo disk to show publishers, and I also found myself an agent."

> "I ASKED ANIL ABOUT LOYALTY, AND HE SAID HE OWED ME NONE. THAT'S WHEN I DECIDED TO TAKE MY GAME ELSEWHERE"
> DINO DINI

The agent was Jacqui Lyons, co-owner of the literary and software agency Marjacq Micros. Over the past decade the agency had represented dozens of programmers, including Jez San, David Braben, Ian Bell, Jonathan Griffiths and many more. Several publishers were interested in signing Dino's new game. In the early Nineties, Virgin was in the throes of an aggressive and very successful period in its history, brokering distribution deals with big names including LucasArts and signing lots of UK talent to its label. It was the perfect fit.

With a contract signed to Virgin and Mike Merren assigned to be the producer, Dino continued developing the lead Amiga version. *Goal!* featured many recognisable features carried over from Dino's previous *Kick Off* series, including the choice of pitch types but was missing icy pitches and the unpredictable bounce of the artificial surface. That decade-long experiment embraced by QPR, then Luton Town, Oldham Athletic and Preston North End had been ended by the English FA a couple of years earlier. All the new in-game graphics were created by artist Mark Coleman, working under the name Design Systems, with all the player sprites being larger than those used in the *Kick Off* series.

Players could take part in a single match, an arcade challenge, a league, a practice session, or choose to edit teams, load and view saved action replays from disk but the cup competition was originally omitted due to time constraints. "There was always pressure to release, so sometimes we had to cut things", explains Dino. In the days before the internet, the only way to get any updates released was through the postal system. A couple of months after the initial release, v1.1 was ready, complete with the addition of the cup competition. Owners could send their original disk 1 back to Virgin and be sent a new replacement v1.1 disk along with a supplemental manual explaining how the cup competition worked.

Remembering that *Goal!* was an arcade game and not a simulation, there were a few notable absentees in the game design. Off-sides were never going to be implemented, but the recently introduced back-pass rule was present, so keepers would automatically kick the ball when receiving a pass from one of their teammates. Arcade features included the ability to affect the ball in flight, and dotted lines showed the intended direction of setpieces like throw-ins, and corner kicks.

The overall delays incurred during the development of *Goal!* are something that Dino regrets in hindsight due to the publication in the summer of 1992 of a similar 16-bit arcade football game called *Sensible Soccer*. That game was a natural progression from Sensible Software's overhead and vertically scrolling football game *Microprose Soccer*, published back in 1986. *Sensible Soccer* was also developed ▶

in reaction to the success that the *Kick Off* series had experienced, and what Sensible perceived to be its shortcomings.

The clamour from the UK and European computer press to praise *Sensible Soccer* upon its release left Dino experiencing doubt and upped the self-inflicted pressure he put on himself to make his game even better. The July 1992 issue of *Amiga Power* magazine then published a fake letter allegedly from Dino, which portrayed him in a bad light. It was a situation Dino felt compelled to publicly respond to, and despite a later published retraction, his relationship with the UK industry began to sour as a result. That unpleasant experience was extremely unhelpful at a time when development on *Goal!* was all-consuming.

Despite all the external noise, development was relatively smooth on the lead Amiga version, with the usual niggly bugs being promptly resolved. The ever-changing team data was constantly in flux until the mastering stage, as the infamous transfer window was still almost a decade away from being introduced, so keeping team information up-to-date was difficult.

When *Goal!* was released in the summer of 1993, it performed well in the face of stiff competition at a point in time when the UK and Europe players were heavily favouring cartridge-based consoles over home computers for general gaming. Dino therefore took the opportunity to write a conversion for the Sega Mega Drive soon after as his ST conversion was finished, and that task presented him with a whole new set of technical challenges. "That platform was a completely different beast and used a tiling system with very little video memory," explains Dino. "It was a challenge to devise the graphics code to make the port work. I had to use the video memory as a cache and download tiles from ROM on the fly during horizontal and vertical blanks, because the graphics wouldn't all fit in video RAM." Having to do this technical trick proved beneficial when it came to adding different skin colours to the game for the first time, as Dino reveals. "That was achieved by swapping pixel colours on the fly to use a shoe tone for the skin. It was very slow, but the caching system allowed it to be done, which is great because my first reaction when the publisher asked for this was, 'How the heck am I going to do that without doubling the graphics memory?'"

» [Amiga] A foul in the area and a penalty is awarded, just like in the real sport.

> "WHEN THE FOOTBALL GAME FOR MICROPROSE WAS CANCELLED, I KNEW THE WRITING WAS ON THE WALL FOR INDIE GAME DEVELOPMENT"
> DINO DINI

CONVERSION CAPERS

AMIGA

■ *Goal!* on the Amiga is considered the best of the home-computer versions. It boasts great visuals, great sound and quick gameplay. What more could you possibly want?

ATARI ST

■ Dino's ST conversion was identical to the Amiga except all the pitch types looked the same, with no additional graphical details to portray pools of water, mud, or nicely manicured grass.

PC

■ The IBM PC conversion was given to Chris Sawyer. Aside from slightly less well formed and smaller players and pitch, the only other concession was having the scanner displayed to the side.

» [Amiga] At the end of the day Brian, you could always rage quit a match.

» [Amiga] Unfortunately, there was no option to choose to play without a referee.

A sample of Dino saying, "Dino Dini's Soccer. It's in the name," aped the EA Sports speech that was quickly becoming synonymous with that publisher. This was then followed by a rendition of Allister Brimble's theme tune. The Mega Drive version released in 1994 featured fictionalised player names compared to the home-computer versions, made as a precautionary step due to the imminent arrival of official player name licensing deals. Virgin also published a SNES version written by Eurocom but with no input from Dino it looked and felt like a completely different game. "They made their own version and ignored the source code they were given, and I regret that I ever agreed to that deal", says Dino.

After *Goal!* was completed, a new football strategy game was signed to Microprose UK, incorporating the same game engine for the match sequences, but that publisher was experiencing major problems of its own. "When the football game for Microprose was cancelled, I knew the writing was on the wall for indie game development," recalls Dino. "I was seeking to gain experience working in the corporate industry, and it was going to be much easier to do that in the USA". Feeling that he was not respected and had become a divisive character within the UK industry, Dino left for the States, where he continued to work on games as a project director and senior programmer. He then had a stint as an academic lecturer, teaching videogame programming in the Netherlands, before returning to the UK and resuming as a development director and programmer. He even brought *Kick Off* back as a PS4 and PS Vita game in 2016.

Whilst Dino today has mixed feelings about the period of his career that produced his football games, there are many people who remember *Goal!* with fondness. It was an immaculately presented, feature-rich and hugely enjoyable game. Yes, playing matches took a little bit of practice and dare we say skill to master the game controls, but once you were in sync with the game, it was well worth all the effort. To fans of the game, Dino definitely achieved his goal.

Richard C Hewison was a tester and wrote the manual for the home-computer versions of *Goal!*.

BRANDING REQUIRED

SEAN BRANNON ON ADDING ADIDAS TO GOAL!

» [Amiga] The first thing you saw in a match were Adidas logos at pitch-side.

Third-party official branding was added to *Goal!* for the home-computer versions. Virgin's Sean Brennan and his marketing team contacted Adidas and struck a deal with the leisure and sportswear company to include the Adidas logo and name prominently on the game packaging and manuals. Some in-game screens and the advertising boards around the pitch during matches also featured the Adidas name and famous three stripes logo. The deal also included featuring the Adidas Etrusco Unico World Cup football design, most recently seen during the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy.

The arrangement was a co-operative cross-marketing exercise with no financial incentives involved. The terminology displayed was 'Supported by Adidas', hinting at the low-key arrangement behind the deal. "As far as I can remember, we only did it for the branding and the marketing support," recalls Sean. This wasn't the first time that Adidas had featured in an arcade football computer game though. Back in 1990, Ocean Software published *Adidas Championship Football* for the ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64, Amiga and Atari ST. The Adidas licence that time was loud, proud and on the nose, but the game was poorly received and quickly forgotten.

WHICH WAS THE GREATEST GOAL! CONVERSION THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN?

MEGA DRIVE

Dino's Mega Drive conversion was arguably the smoothest version to play. League and high-score tables could be saved to the cartridge's battery-backed CMOS, which was very handy.

SNES

The SNES version by Eurocom had plenty of options and a few more pitch types including snow and ice and different grass patterns, but the control system and general gameplay wasn't as smooth.

146900
RYU

Street Fighter Alpha 2

FIGHTING RIVALRIES

» SATURN » 1996 » CAPCOM

Although Nick was one of the sweetest guys on the planet, you certainly didn't want to see his competitive side. We often used to joke that he was more man than machine when he punished us relentlessly on puzzlers like *Puyo Puyo Tetris* or *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, and he was equally adept at pummelling us silly when playing fighting games.

Nick would always select the default character whenever we played a beat-'em-up, so his pick for any *Street Fighter* game was always Ryu. And he didn't even bother selecting a different set of clothes if it was available, he always went with that iconic white gi. I'm pretty sure he'd have been adept at any character he chose to master, but there was something endearing about the way he stoically battled through each brawl, even if a character's stats would put him at a disadvantage.

Street Fighter Alpha 2 was one of the last games he was going to write about and he mentioned how he first discovered it with an old school friend called James who he often went to Sega Park with. He adored *Alpha*'s tight gameplay and well-realised backgrounds and was happy to take turns playing the game on James' Saturn, as James only had one joypad at the time.

I'd never heard this story before, but that's one of the things I used to love about Nick's Retro Revivals, you often got as much insight into Nick as you did the game he was writing about. I now have a much better understanding of why *Street Fighter Alpha 2* was always one of the first fighting games he would suggest putting on whenever he popped over for a game night. In fact, I intend to play the game tonight and will pick Ryu in Nick's honour.

A TRIBUTE TO Sensible SOFTWARE

FORMED BY JON HARE AND CHRIS YATES IN 1986, SENSIBLE SOFTWARE GRACED THE MID-EIGHTIES TO THE LATE-NINETIES WITH ORIGINAL CREATIONS LIKE WIZBALL, SENSIBLE SOCCER AND CANNON FODDER. JON HARE REVIEWS THE STUDIO'S HUGELY POPULAR OUTPUT

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

After trailing Sensible Software in March 1986 via an Easter egg in their surreal 3D shooter *Twister*, Jon Hare and Chris Yates officially launched the studio in mid-1986.

Following *Twister*'s success, Sensible delivered two more shoot-'em-ups: the budget *Galaxian* tribute *Galax-I-Birds* and the top-down blaster/arcade adventure *Parallax*. 1987 saw it release the highly original *Wizball*, which tasked players with weaponising a ball-like hero while colouring-in his grey world. Sensible also released the chart-topping *SEUCK: Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* in 1987 as well.

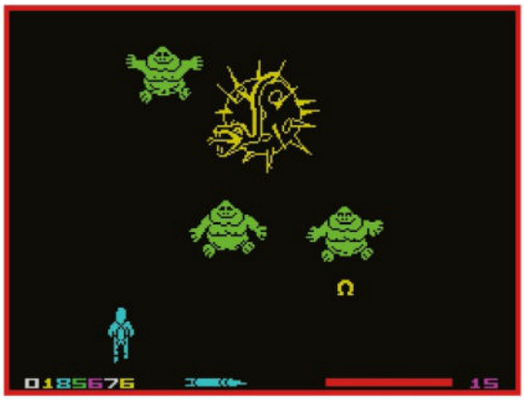
The studio's offerings for 1988 were the popular football sim *Microprose Soccer* and the fun budget shooter *Oh No!*. Then in 1990 it released the crazy *Dropzone* homage *Insects In Space* and the polygon-powered *International 3D Tennis*.

The year after, Sensible released the real-time strategy title *Mega lo Mania*. It then redefined football games in 1992 with *Sensible Soccer*, and in the same year followed-up *Wizball* with the weird and wonderful *Wizkid*. Sensible's strategy shooter *Cannon Fodder* arrived in 1993, and it received a sequel one year later. A version of *Sensible Soccer* appeared on consoles that same year, and the venerable football title then spawned a series that ran until 1997, the best of which was *Sensible World Of Soccer*.

Sensible was then sold to Codemasters in 1999, and various releases based on Sensible IPs followed. Codemasters itself was sold to EA in 2021, and it's uncertain if there are more Sensible IP projects to come. What's clear, however, is the originality and quality of the studio's creations. ★

JON HARE

After playing in bands together for years, teenage artist Jon Hare started making games with coder friend Chris Yates. The pair later formed Sensible Software and created the likes of *Wizball* and *Sensible Soccer* together. Jon still works in games, with his latest project being *Sensible Soccer*'s successor: *Sporty FC*.



TWISTER: MOTHER OF CHARLOTTE

ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

■ Part platformer, part shooter and completely mad! *Twister* launches floating platforms at the player that have to be jumped between, and moving floors and ceilings that have to be run along. All the while, odd creatures have to be dispatched and strange symbols need to be collected.

JON'S MEMORIES

"With *Twister*, it was just experimenting with what I could draw with the package I had, using any ideas that came into my head. A certain key combination could be pressed, and it said, 'Developed by Sensible Software.' The reason that's significant is because we weren't officially Sensible Software at that stage. So we had to sneak the name in. Then the company properly emerged about four months after the launch of *Twister*."

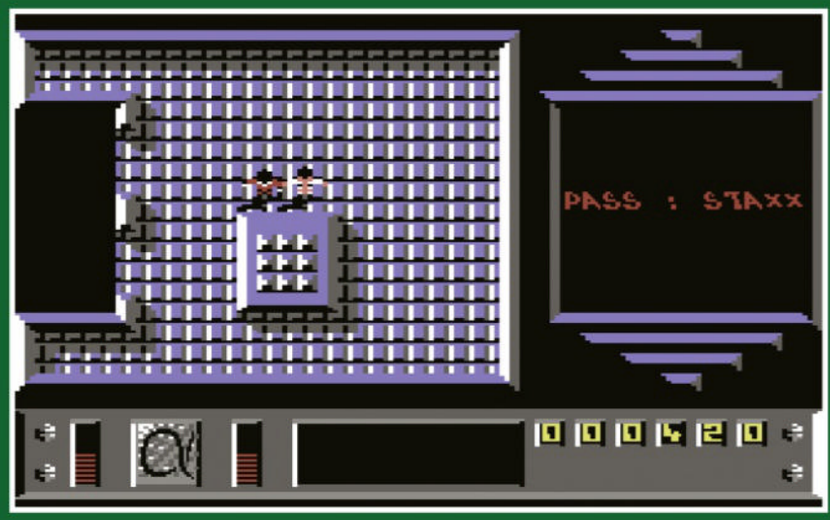
GALAX-I-BIRDS

C64 • 1986

■ *Galaxian* was never this fast or furious! The inspiration for *Galax-I-Birds* wasn't based on birds either, although the Sensible shooter also gives you angels and asteroids to blast if you survive long enough to see them. It's a fun challenge, if your reflexes can handle it.

JON'S MEMORIES

"*Galax-I-Birds* was the second game that we did. We tended to take a long time making games like *Parallax*, *Wizball*, *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* or whatever. Then in the middle of those for light relief we'd do a budget title. We would just want to have some fun for two weeks before going back to doing something serious again. That's what those little games were, and *Galax-I-Birds* was a stupid version of *Galaxian*."



PARALLAX

C64 • 1986

■ The genre-defying *Parallax* alternates between *Uridium*-style firefights and arcade adventuring. The latter involves drugging and kidnapping scientists, forcing them to enter codes and stealing their cash cards. You use these to buy supplies such as ship upgrades and oxygen.

ECLECTIC OBJECTIVES THE CEREBRAL SHOOTER'S DISTINCTIVE GOALS

SHOOT-'EM-UP

■ Ruthless opponents pepper *Parallax*'s levels, spewing deadly floating ammo as they go. The best defence is to take them out before they can fire back.

PERFECT PILOTING

■ Taking a leaf out of *Uridium*'s book, *Parallax* tests your piloting skills as often as your trigger finger. A sound landing technique is also required.

TAKING CREDIT

■ You need weapons, ammo and oxygen in *Parallax*, but they cost credits. Luckily, you can steal credit cards from scientists to use in the game's shops.

CODE BREAKER

■ The additional use for stolen credit cards is that they store letters of a password. After you complete a password you can fly off to the next level.

JON'S MEMORIES

"We had the flying around bit, which was fun, and then we wanted to just put a little bit more depth into it. We wanted to land the spacecraft, but then what were we going to do? Well we just wanted to get out and run around, and we wanted shooting. I haven't ever reflected on how the *Parallax* characters weren't a million miles away from the characters in our games that came much later like *Mega lo Mania*, *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer*. That's never crossed my mind before now."

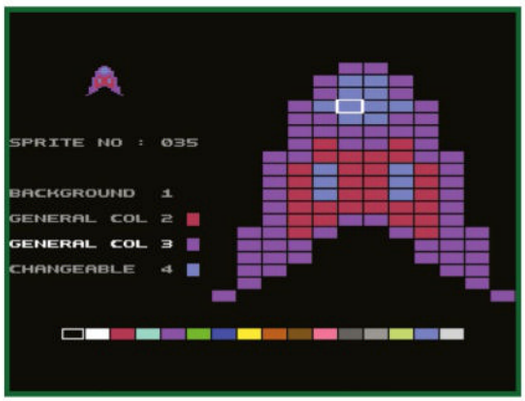
WIZBALL

C64, VARIOUS • 1987

■ An ingenious upgrade system turns the all but uncontrollable Wizball into a living weapon. Once you've got him blasting foes with ease you can use his cat to colour their drab world. You tackle not one but three stages at once, using portals to get from one to another.

JON'S MEMORIES

"One thing with *Wizball* was the ability to play the levels in a weird order, rather than being stuck colouring in one level before proceeding to the next. It was a classic Sensible game. Aside from the multi-levelled structure, we were doing something quite ordinary with this horizontally scrolling shooter, and then we just added a little bit extra. It was very much influenced by *Dropzone*. We also enjoyed games like *Nemesis* where you levelled-up weapons to make your ship better. So *Wizball* was a bit of *Nemesis* and a bit of *Dropzone* with a bit of us."



SEUCK: SHOOT-'EM-UP CONSTRUCTION KIT

C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST • 1987

■ A revelation for budding games designers in the late-Eighties who could never dream of learning to code, *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* has everything you need to make a top-down shooter. Its brilliance lies in the fact that it's so straightforward and intuitive to use.

JON'S MEMORIES

"The initial purpose of us making the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* was we wanted me to be able to make games, so that we were faster. So Chris Yates made this tool. It was a bit of a landmark release for us. You could create your own background graphics, your own sprites, attack waves, sound effects and levels. Basically you could construct your own shoot-'em-up, and you didn't need to code. It was a very early version of a constructor game, and it proved to be really successful."

MICROPROSE SOCCER

C64, VARIOUS • 1988

■ An arcade adaptation of the beautiful game rather than an accurate sim, *Microprose Soccer* encourages possession by making the ball stick to players' feet, and encourages opponents to take it from each other with sliding tackles. All of which makes it fun and fast end-to-end stuff.

AWESOME ASPECTS WHY THE SOCCER SIM IS SO ENJOYABLE

MULTIPLE MODES

■ As well as one or two-player one-off matches, leagues and tournaments, you can play indoor games with all the fun of bouncing the ball off the pitch side walls.

SUPERB SETTINGS

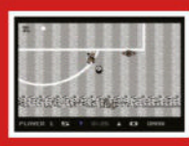
■ The wealth of customisations available include team names, strip colours, match length, colour and black-and-white modes, and if you have in-game music or not.

TRICK SHOTS

■ In addition to standard volleys and chip shots, you can impress the crowd with overhead kicks or by skillfully bending the ball left or right David Beckham-style.

FUN FEATURES

■ A random weather option can be selected and there are lively tunes before, during and after matches. There are also Eighties-era action replays after each goal!



JON'S MEMORIES

"There was an arcade football game called *Tehkan World Cup*. It was tabletop, and you had one player at each end. It had trackballs and it killed your fingers! That was the basis of *Microprose Soccer*. The interesting anomaly with *Tehkan World Cup* was that sometimes when you kicked the ball it would bend, so we looked at bending the ball in *Microprose Soccer* after you kicked it. But what we discovered was that the ball bending in *Tehkan World Cup* wasn't intentional. It was a bug!"

OH NO!

C64 • 1988

■ This is based on the vector coin-op *Rip Off*, although *Oh No!* changes and adds to the concepts established by its inspiration enough to be considered almost entirely original. Whereas *Rip Off* tasks you with protecting fuel cells from marauding pirates, *Oh No!* challenges you to raise orb-like beings called Oxes while safeguarding them from rustlers. In terms of layouts, the playfield in *Rip Off* is single-screen, but with *Oh No!* you have a scrolling playfield to patrol that's four times the size of the screen. Additionally, *Rip Off* features a single repeating level rendered in black and white, while *Oh No!* has nine differently hued stages of increasing difficulty. There's only one opponent type in *Rip Off*, where *Oh No!* has many. Then there's the fact that you and your enemies drive tanks in *Rip Off*. In *Oh No!* you pilot a spaceship and your rustler antagonists are represented by geometric shapes. Perhaps most importantly, *Rip Off*'s player vehicle stops when you stop moving it, unlike the ship in *Oh No!* which moves constantly at speed and challenges you to steer it.

TOP TIPS HOW TO TACKLE THE FRENETIC SHOOT-'EM-UP

CONTROL FREAK

■ Imagine *Asteroids* with its inertia on steroids and you have an idea of the practice required to control your craft.

PROTECTION POINTERS

■ You can't move your Oxes but rustlers can, so blast them as soon as they take one to stop the herd being split-up.

ECLECTIC ENEMIES

■ Aside from cow-snatching foes, there are ammo-firing and obstructive enemies, plus opponents that bounce you around.

VARIED VISITORS

■ In amongst the aforementioned villains you occasionally see an Ox Parent. If you blast these you get an extra Ox.

INSECTS IN SPACE

C64 • 1990

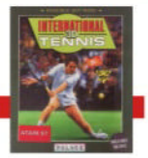
■ Far from being *Defender* with tweaked visuals, *Insects In Space* instead takes what made the coin-op great and adds layers of depth. Rather than one planet surface you get two; the second one is upside down and above you. In addition to lasers, you get smart bombs and a cherub sidekick. As well as thieving antagonists, like *Defender*'s, *Insects In Space* has foes that lay mines and hatch homing maggots.

JON'S MEMORIES

"In *Insects In Space* we effectively did an up and down *Defender* clone with you going from the floor to the ceiling. There are some interesting things in *Insects In Space*. Its player sprite was like a *Defender* spaceship disguised as a woman with wings. Then you had the insects and you had the babies that you could rescue. But it was *Dropzone*. That was all *Insects In Space* really was; it was *Dropzone*. *Insects In Space* was all Chris with me adding some graphics. It was very much Chris loving *Defender* and *Dropzone* and us wanting to make our version of those. I think it was a really good game, actually."

INTERNATIONAL 3D TENNIS

C64, VARIOUS • 1990



■ *International 3D Tennis* depicts the sport using polygon graphics and replicates entire seasons of tournaments. You can play at various difficulty levels with varying amounts of assist, but you're always automatically moved horizontally into position to take your shot.

JON'S MEMORIES

"*International 3D Tennis* came about because Chris Yates had mastered the Commodore 64 and wanted to prove he could do 3D on it. We had a brief tennis playing period. We would hire a court for an hour and then spend 45 minutes remembering how to serve properly! Then I bought these tennis magazines that listed all the tournaments and their prize money, and I duplicated that in the game. Although the players looked like Czech cartoon characters in polygons they were actually players like Boris Becker and Stefan Edberg!"

MEGA LO MANIA

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1991

■ *Mega lo Mania*'s objective is the domination of islands, and the key to success is resource management. Conquering land requires armies, but you also need weapons designed and towers constructed. This requires elements to be mined, and you have limited men to do all of this.

INSTANT EXPERT THE COMPELLING STRATEGY TITLE'S CORE GAMEPLAY

NEW BUILDS

■ In order to expand your territory you have to build structures on enemy land and then defend them in the event of an attack.

MAN MANAGEMENT

■ How you assign people is crucial. Well-armed soldiers depend on weapons designers, and they depend on people mining elements.

R & D

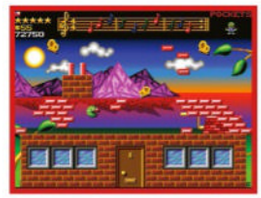
■ Development of weapons is cyclical. Each time a set number of them are designed your people can build more advanced ones.

THE ART OF WAR

■ As well as weaponry and armour, you have to consider how many to send into battle or if you should form an alliance instead.

JON'S MEMORIES

"Originally, *Mega lo Mania* had space combat. It was about mining planets for materials, which meant new weapons to fire at enemies. But managing 16 planets and flying around shooting spacecraft at the same time was impossible. At that time, *Populous* launched and I had a brainwave. We knew the tech race in space wasn't going to work, so instead of 16 planets we could stick to one world and not fly between planets. Then we set the tech race in 10,000 BC and on through eras in history, rather than in a futuristic period."



WIZKID: THE STORY OF WIZBALL II

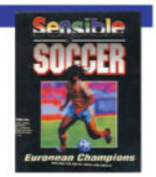
AMIGA, ATARI ST • 1992

■ Although it's the sequel to *Wizball*, *Wizkid* is light on shoot-'em-up sections and doesn't involve colouring-in worlds. Instead there are block-busting challenges, arcade adventuring and even crosswords! There aren't many games where you have no idea what's coming next, but *Wizkid* is one.

JON'S MEMORIES

"We were talking to Ocean about doing a sequel to *Wizball*. We wanted to keep the characters, but we also wanted to be a bit more creative. The idea behind *Wizkid*'s player character was that we liked the character in *Wizball* with his little green head. Then we got into the *Arkanoid*-style brick-busting bits, and we put various new rules in that. We also had an adventure game and crosswords that popped up. It had very weird level structures and very strange little puzzles. It was also the last game Chris Yates and I made together, so it was like a goodbye to the old Sensible Software and the 8-bit era when you had smaller development teams."

SENSIBLE SOCCER: EUROPEAN CHAMPIONS



AMIGA, ATARI ST • 1992

■ By showing more of the pitch, having far smaller players and using a clever camera, *Sensible Soccer* delivers a completely different experience to *Microprose Soccer*. The ball doesn't stick to the players' feet either, which makes dribbling and one-touch passes essential skills to learn.

JON'S MEMORIES

"We turned the perspective of the *Mega lo Mania* world into a pitch, and it directly translated into a great camera angle for football players. Then the *Mega lo Mania* guys were just at the right scale. It was a fluke! We were playing *Kick Off 2*, and we hated the passing, because you couldn't see who you were passing to. In *Sensible Soccer* if you were running up the pitch the camera dragged your player back so they were lower down the screen, so two-thirds of your view was in front of you and one-third was behind. That let you see who you were passing to."

CANNON FODDER

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1993

■ A shoot-'em-up at heart, but one with tactics and strategy, *Cannon Fodder* takes top-down war-themed games to another level. Instead of endless firefights, there are mission-based stages with combat. You decide how to approach navigation of battlefields and how to defeat your foes.

ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES WHAT MAKES THE SHOOTER SO UNIQUE

MIGHTY MOUSE

■ In *Cannon Fodder* you control your soldiers with a mouse not a joystick. They go where you left click and fire where you right click.

GROUP DYNAMICS

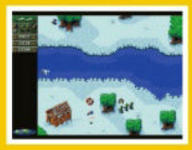
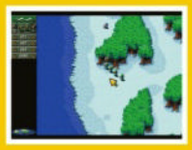
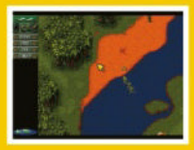
■ If you select a whole troop then where one soldier goes they all go, but you can split them up and send them to different locations as well.

TOP TACTICS

■ Mapping out the lay of the land, stealth attacks and picking off foes one by one are often better options than just charging in.

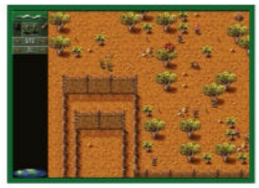
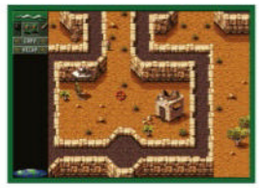
SUPERB SETTINGS

■ In addition to jungle, arctic and desert battlefields, you take your soldiers into underground labyrinths and rural locations.

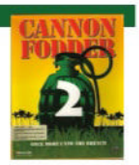
JON'S MEMORIES

"When we first started developing *Cannon Fodder* we were all playing *Lemmings* in the office. The initial concept was to make *Lemmings* with weapons. So we took a game like *Rambo* where you had a character in the centre of the screen then we extended it to a troop of soldiers, which was similar to *Lemmings* where you got multiple player characters. *Cannon Fodder* was about the soldiers working together, and trying to keep them alive. Pointing and clicking the mouse helped to move them and to split them up, it also helped to aim at the targets. The console versions didn't work as well, because you couldn't specify where you wanted the soldiers and their ammo to go so easily. It worked best with a mouse."

CANNON FODDER 2

AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC • 1994



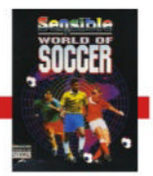
■ Despite having similar gameplay to its predecessor, *Cannon Fodder 2* differentiates itself with its level designs and steep difficulty curve. A narrative involving alien abductions and time travel sets up eclectic battles in medieaval Europe, Thirties Chicago and even on alien planets.

JON'S MEMORIES

"By *Cannon Fodder 2* I was working on *Sensible World Of Soccer* and *Sex, Drugs And Rock 'N' Roll*. Both were big games, so I didn't have time to work with the team on *Cannon Fodder 2*. I delegated the design to Stu Campbell from *Amiga Power*. It wasn't a bad game, but it wasn't as good as *Cannon Fodder*. Some of the levels took you away from reality, the bits with aliens and stuff, and the difficulty ramp was pretty harsh. It was just that the design team didn't have that awareness of how someone who wasn't a designer would react to it."

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

AMIGA, PC • 1994



■ Although *Sensible World Of Soccer* retains the basic gameplay of its predecessor, it's a full-blown sequel rather than an improved iteration. In terms of on-pitch action, it introduces supporters wearing their team's colours and sounding more realistic than those in the earlier games. There are sports photographers and police in attendance too, and *SWOS*' goalkeepers are tougher to beat. Just as importantly, it boasts a remarkably full-featured career mode that lets you manage a vast number of real-world clubs with real-world players over multiple seasons. But despite all of this, *SWOS* ensures broad appeal by remaining an arcade experience rather than a management sim. Considering its depth, it's little wonder that it's such a popular Amiga title.

JON'S MEMORIES

"If you look at *Sensible World Of Soccer* you were building a squad, but in terms of what you were seeing, it was the same sprites with different coloured hair or kits on. So you were just basically building stats. It was a stat building-type game."

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

PLAYSTATION ODDITIES

NICK WAS A FAN OF ODD, QUIRKY GAMES AND THE PLAYSTATION IS A BOTTOMLESS WELL OF INTERESTING AND OBSCURE GEMS. WE'VE PLUMBED THE CONSOLE'S DEPTHS TO FIND TEN ODDITIES THAT NICK LOVED OR WOULD HAVE ENJOYED PLAYING

Words by Sean Seanson

THE GUARDIAN OF DARKNESS

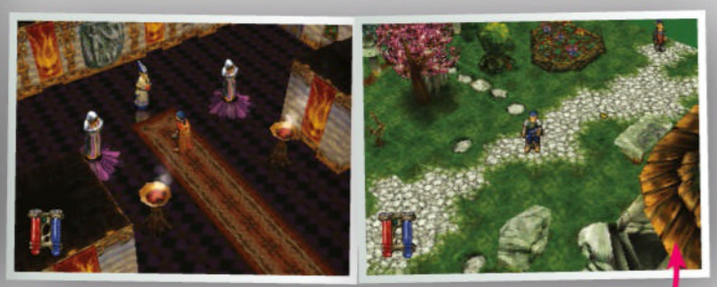
Cryo Interactive released many bizarre experiments on the PlayStation, and *The Guardian Of Darkness* is certainly one of them, being a game that sees you take the role of a ghost-hunting monk working for a secret organisation. It's not very good, but it does look beautiful on occasion. Plus, you get to play as an *Adore*-era Billy Corgan lookalike, so that's fun.

FIRO & KLAWD

We certainly love an odd couple, and also an animal duo, and in *Firo & Klawd*, you get both. In this 2D isometric shooter, you play as either ape detective Firo or money-smuggler cat Klawd as they team up to take down the dog mafia in an animal-filled version of New York. The unhinged cutscenes are worth the price of admission alone.

POWER DIGGERZ

One of Taito's best PlayStation games is all about the joy of using a heavy vehicle to move dirt from one location to another. Not only is *Power Diggerz* a true-to-life simulation of the dirt-shovelling experience, but it's also packed with silly minigames that let you demolish cars, make curry and save turtles using the power of diggers. A true hidden gem.



TECHNOMAGE: RETURN OF ETERNITY

Looking at the horrendous box art of this 2001 German-made action RPG is enough to ward you off this thing. But as we all know, you shouldn't judge a game by its cover, because *TechnoMage* is a surprisingly ambitious and full-featured fantasy game featuring some lovely low-poly environments, 2D character sprites and delightfully bad English voice acting for every in-game NPC.

STEEL HARBINGER

■ We've all been there: you're a scientist in the middle of an alien invasion, and your daughter gets turned into a half-human, half-alien killing machine and is the only hope of saving the world. It happens to the best of us. *Steel Harbinger* is like the sci-fi B-movie equivalent of *Loaded*, only with significantly more cheesy live-action cutscenes and people being blown up.

NIGHT RAID

■ Shmup fans no doubt know of Takumi thanks to its excellent arcade shooters like *Giga Wing* and *Mars Matrix*. Over on the PlayStation, Japan would be treated to a port of one of its G-Net-based shooters, *Night Raid*. It's a game packed with metal guitar riffs, intense bullet patterns and a ship that bounces around the screen like it's had too many cans of Monster.

KLAYMEN GUN-HOCKEY

■ We're sure a lot of you remember the much-loved claymation classics *The Neverhood* and *Skullmonkeys*. While they were a modest hit over here in the West, the series was a surprise success in Japan. So much so that the PlayStation received a Japan-exclusive *Neverhood* air-hockey game. It's a shame *Gun-Hockey* as a game is quite poor, but it's certainly an interesting curiosity.

KITCHEN PANIC

■ Don't let this cutesy 2D platformer about a potato trying to win back the kitchen from an army of canned goods fool you. This game is notorious in Japan for its difficulty, with some calling it the hardest 2D platformer ever made. This obscurity should only be tried by masochists or fans of really cute potatoes; sadly, we are both.

RUNNING HIGH

■ The PlayStation is a console known for its racing library, and one of its most interesting sub-genres is runner racers, where instead of racing in a vehicle, you are the vehicle. This arcade racer features fast-paced gameplay, futuristic tracks, jet-powered running suits, and even a *Road Rash*-esque combat system. Prepare for the incredible opening theme to be stuck in your head for days.

KERO KERO KING

■ An oddity in its own right, the cult-classic frog-golf ('frolf') title *Ribbit King* actually got its start over on the PlayStation with the original entry *Kero Kero King*. This game manages to channel the eccentric plotlines and art style of *Parappa The Rapper*, with a legitimately fun, content-rich golf game based around firing frogs from a catapult with a hammer.

THE MAKING OF EARTHION

ANCIENT CORP'S NEW MEGA DRIVE SHOOTER EARTHION HAS DELIGHTED AUDIENCES (INCLUDING NICK) WITH ITS STUNNING PIXEL ART, SUMPTUOUS SOUND AND ENERGETIC GAMEPLAY. WITH THAT IN MIND, WE ASKED LEGENDARY GAME COMPOSER YUZO KOSHIRO AND DESIGNER MAKOTO WADA TO LIFT THE LID ON ITS CREATION

WORDS BY WILL FREEMAN

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** LIMITED RUN GAMES, SUPERDELUXE GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** ANCIENT CORP (SUPPORTED BY BITWAVE GAMES)
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **RELEASED:** 2025
- **GENRE:** SHMUP

Ancient Corp's CEO Yuzo Koshiro is also one of the most celebrated forces when it comes to Japanese videogame music composition. His work can be heard across so many classic titles, from *Sonic The Hedgehog* to the *Streets Of Rage* series, and he was something of a visionary in being among the first to present live orchestral performances of his soundtracks; a concept that is now a mainstay of videogame fan culture.

What is rather less known, is his passion for arcade shooting games. "I've been profoundly influenced by arcade shoot-'em-ups from the late-Eighties to early Nineties," Koshiro tells us. "Games from that era had an incredible sense of tension and polish, all within the confines of simple rules. The music, the visuals, the controls – everything came together to create these uniquely immersive worlds. I was especially inspired by the music of that time.

"Despite the limitations of the sound chips, each game had its own wildly creative sound, with a distinct personality that really set them apart. I've always wanted to experience what it's like to build an entire world myself. Nowadays, shooters are getting fewer and far between, but that's part of what made the challenge interesting. There's still something really exciting about seeing how new of an impact one can deliver within those limitations. That's where the genre still holds its charm for me."

The result was a commitment to build a native Mega Drive shooter set for release

» [PC] The variety of enemy and environment design serves up a board sweep of engrossing atmospheres.

» [PC] Most of the mid and mini-bosses are so tough they feel like true bosses.

YUZO KOSHIRO

The legendary Yuzo Koshiro has created stunning soundtracks for numerous games, from *The Revenge Of Shinobi* to the *Streets Of Rage* series.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR
RELEASED: 1991

STREETS OF RAGE II
PLATFORM: MASTER SYSTEM
RELEASED: 1992

BEYOND OASIS
PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE
RELEASED: 1994

» [PC] Evoking a feel of Toaplan's lavish pixel effects, when *Earthion*'s bosses pop, they really explode.

» [PC] Every stage is packed with pixelated detail, lending *Earthion* a very visceral feel.

in current times. That game became *Earthion*; a wildly popular shmup, and – thanks to releases across the PC and consoles – a title that broke out beyond its own genre, delighting many in the mainstream.

The resulting game strikes an impressive balance between respect for its form, and innovation. Shooters can be a tricky genre when it comes to innovation. Most by far are definitely compliant to a strict template. Fans generally expect an arcade credit structure, linear scrolling levels, and scoring systems of various complexities – and, of course, a core built on bullet dodging and returning fire. It is rather telling that when a shmup has anything other than five-to-six stages, it is considered a little 'out there'. Few game genres are so prescriptive. And yet 2D shooters are famed for the finesse, balance, and depth they wrap in their seemingly simple rules of 'shoot-and-dodge'. The innovation, so often, comes within the confines of that template.

> "I'VE BEEN PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED BY ARCADE SHOOT-'EM-UPS"
> YUZO KOSHIRO

Together with Makoto Wada, programmer, planner, designer and director on *Earthion*, producer and composer Koshiro has built a game that resists the current fascination with bullet hell games, instead leaning into the less arcade-tethered style of classic Mega Drive shooters. "I spent a lot of time thinking about how we could take that vision and shape it into something that would still feel fresh and relevant today," Wada reveals. "Modern shoot-'em-ups often emphasise bullet-dodging and visual flair, but since we were developing for the Mega Drive [and] Genesis, I felt we had to approach it differently. If we didn't focus on something simpler and more fundamental, we wouldn't be able to compete.

"Therefore, we put a lot of care into the core experience – things like the effects when enemies are destroyed, the way debris flies, the sound design. We really wanted those basic elements to feel satisfying on a visceral level. That's where we focussed our energy."

The result is a game that is tremendously fun and rewarding, even when a run through *Earthion* goes awry – and that is a true mark of a brilliant shooter with wide appeal. Thanks to the remarkable pixel art, world building and environmental detail, along with the magnificently present sound effects and score, *Earthion*'s world feels near palpable. It is a place to visit as well as a game to play – something more typically said of narratively heavy, cutscene-drenched RPGs. And whenever you are in that place, you'll find explosive action, dramatic twists of fortune, and a constant stream of excitement. It's the kind of game that makes it hard to sit still as you play.

"*Earthion* is heavily inspired by late-Eighties to early Nineties arcade shoot-'em-ups," Wada says of his effort with the game's design, which in moments is evocative of Toaplan's masterful sprite and background pixel art. "Back then, many shooters conveyed their story through visuals rather than text, and we followed that same approach. This was actually my first time developing a game for ▶

ALEX ANIEL

■ Alex works for Limited Run Games and has worked with Yuzo Koshiro several times.

MAKOTO WADA

■ Despite his veteran status, Makoto Wada has never made a Mega Drive game before.

BACK TO BASICS

EARTHION'S FLIGHT TO A PHYSICAL MEGA DRIVE RELEASE

■ *Earthion* was absolutely conceived and developed as a Mega Drive-native title, which would mean a cartridge release. The team, however, decided to use a PC and console release to gather player feedback, and refine through updates. Eventually, the 'final' version of *Earthion* would be released to cart. As such, Bitwave Games stepped on board to build an emulation wrapper so the Mega Drive code would run on the modern target platforms. And with boxed gaming specialists Limited Run Games on board, the momentum was there to make the cartridge dream a reality.

"*Earthion* was developed on actual Mega Drive hardware, so this is technically the most authentic way to play the game," says Limited Run Games' business development manager for Japan and Asia, Alexander Aniel of the cartridge release. "The console and PC versions rely on emulation to run on modern hardware, and while our emulation technology is fantastic, it's impossible to replicate the Mega Drive's sound 100% without playing on the original hardware. Moreover, a Mega Drive cart for a brand-new title in 2026 makes for a neat collector's item."

Thanks to the high standards of Ancient, the wait is still on for the Mega Drive version of *Earthion*. The official launch window remains set to later this year.

» [PC] We love the detail that's been crammed into this cockpit. We can't wait to experience *Earthion* on an actual Mega Drive.

» [PC] *Earthion* is bookended by pixel-art montages that hint at a wider narrative content.

» [PC] "See you next YKGGG"? YKGGG is Yuzo Koshiro's games label. Lets hope for a sequel.

» [PC] Thanks to a distinctly retro password system, you can take upgrades to a new run.

▶ the Mega Drive, so I went through a lot of trial and error to really understand and make use of what the hardware had to offer. For each stage, I thought hard about which functions or tricks I could use next to create something new – something that hadn't been seen on the Mega Drive before."

> "I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO EXPERIENCE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BUILD AN ENTIRE WORLD"
> **YUZO KOSHIRO**

It is quite remarkable that *Earthion* really is a game developed natively for Mega Drive hardware – as while it feels entirely authentic to Nineties shooter design, it moves and plays like a considerably more recent game. In fact, while the team absolutely built *Earthion* as a 'Mega Drive-first' release, it was in time decided to initially launch on Steam and across modern consoles, so as to pull feedback and learnings from the game being in the market, subsequently informing updates. The plan is that the Mega Drive cartridge, due later this year, will contain the ultimate, most refined build of the game. And after all, a cart is rather harder to update than a Steam file.

Being a Koshiro game, it is absolutely worth lingering on just how *Earthion* sounds so good. The Mega Drive brought impressive audio chops via its Yamaha YM2612 sound chip, and an iconically distinct 'crunchy' sound that continues to be sampled as a shorthand for videogaming to this day. And thanks to Koshiro's immense and long-practiced experience, *Earthion* is a game that oozes sonic style, tone and drama.

"For me, music and game design aren't two separate elements – they're both tools to move the player emotionally, and they constantly influence each other," Koshiro reflects. "In *Earthion*, for example, we were very conscious of aligning the structure and progression of the background music with the level direction and rhythm of enemy placements. The reverse was also true – we would adjust enemy spawn timings to match the emotional climax of a particular track." For a little more on the soundscape Koshiro built, check out the Musical Musings panel found in these pages.

» [PC] You've triumphed over the main game? A list of challenges provide more ways to play.

BOSS RUSH

HOW TO TAKEDOWN EARTHION'S MAYORS

STAGE 1 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

This is a fairly easily beaten floating robotic structure surrounded by similar spacecraft – support vehicles that do you no damage.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

When the bottom section floats away, the boss' weak spot is revealed low in the structure. Target that, and concentrate on dodging the boss' green orb attacks.

STAGE 2 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

A flying vessel that hovers just above sea level, evoking a feel for the enemy design across the *Gradius* series of games.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

After the boss opens up, focus on constantly destroying the upper floating nacelle. Each time that is destroyed, shoot for the main boss' core to destroy it.

STAGE 3 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

A large, heavily armoured floating vehicle that splits in two while unleashing volleys of firepower, revealing a vulnerable spot.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

When the boss divides, concentrate on the tip of the largest section. The more powerful weapon options mean getting in close. Or drop ordnance from above.

STAGE 4 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

A grotesque form – seemingly inspired by HR Giger's art – that pulses back and forth, as corrosive liquid drips from above.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

The head is the obvious weak point. Focus there, dipping down and round attacks. And get ready for the head detachment, when things get even more dynamic.

» [PC] An optional upgrade screen between levels lets you allocate shields, weapon, lives and more.

» [PC] One of the coolest extras is the ability to play through prototype and demo builds.

» [PC] Ancient Corp's Yuzo Koshiro and Makoto Wada played numerous roles on *Earthion*.

The result of so much creative effort across *Earthion*'s visuals and sound, is a game that speaks something of a universal language when it comes to conveying tone and action. Indeed, *Earthion* more broadly has achieved the genre's most challenging goal of bringing the authenticity demanded by shooting game devotees while keeping things welcoming for a vast and varied audience of regular players. And quite surprisingly, it has achieved that through complexity, rather than paring back the number of intersecting systems.

The player has health bars, presented as shields that replenish with time. Lose all your shields, and you lose a life. Interestingly, the weapons also have shield bars, from your standard shot to extra firepower that can be scooped up as power-ups, filling a weapon slot. Take a hit while using a homing missile add-on, for example, and both player and weapon will see their shield diminished. The standard and additional weapons can also be levelled-up through play, and down through damage. That leaves room for some risk-reward strategy balancing on the players' behalf, letting them choose between limiting extra weapon use so as to preserve their most devastating firepower for boss battles, or go all out all the time, at the risk of demeaning your all-important special weapons to pea-shooter status.

> "FOR ME, MUSIC AND GAME DESIGN AREN'T TWO SEPARATE ELEMENTS"
> **YUZO KOSHIRO**

Those extra weapons – from homing projectiles and spread shots to frontal laser barrages and *Gradius*-style floor hammering missiles – can be placed in slots, with the player being granted two empty slots at the game's start, letting you hop strategically back and forth between the game's distinct fire power. Just before each stage's boss, you are also offered an Attachment Pod which replaces an extra weapon of your choice. Keep that pod until you defeat the boss, and you are taken to an upgrade screen evocative of many Mega Drive shmups' shop systems. In that screen between stages, you can assign additional slots to contain either more shields, or more weapon slots. Alternatively, you might choose to upgrade all weapons a level, claim an extra life, or secure a particularly powerful special attack. With only six slots max to share across lives, you'll have to do a little dynamic allocation juggling – deciding whether to give more slots to firepower or shields. It's an unusual system that extends the simple weapon selecting of *Gradius*, ▶

STAGE 5 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

This is a large scientific instrument from a twisted mind, pumping lava into the world below it – or is it mixing up dimensions?

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This one is easier than you might imagine. Target the green glowing vial at the boss' centre, dashing out the way around the rocks thrown at you.

STAGE 6 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

Perhaps *Earthion*'s most traditional boss, this pink ship is loaded with laser canons, and keeps fighting until the bitter end.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

The entire ship is a weak point, so approach it your way. Deft bullet dodging is needed – and don't mistake it exploding for it being done.

STAGE 7 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

A deceptively small flying purple mech armed with a laser crossbow and menacing canon – who also unleashes homing bullets.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This boss is fast and moves erratically. That makes predicting its movements tricky. Keep your distance, and try to take in a homing weapon.

STAGE 8 BOSS

DESCRIPTION:

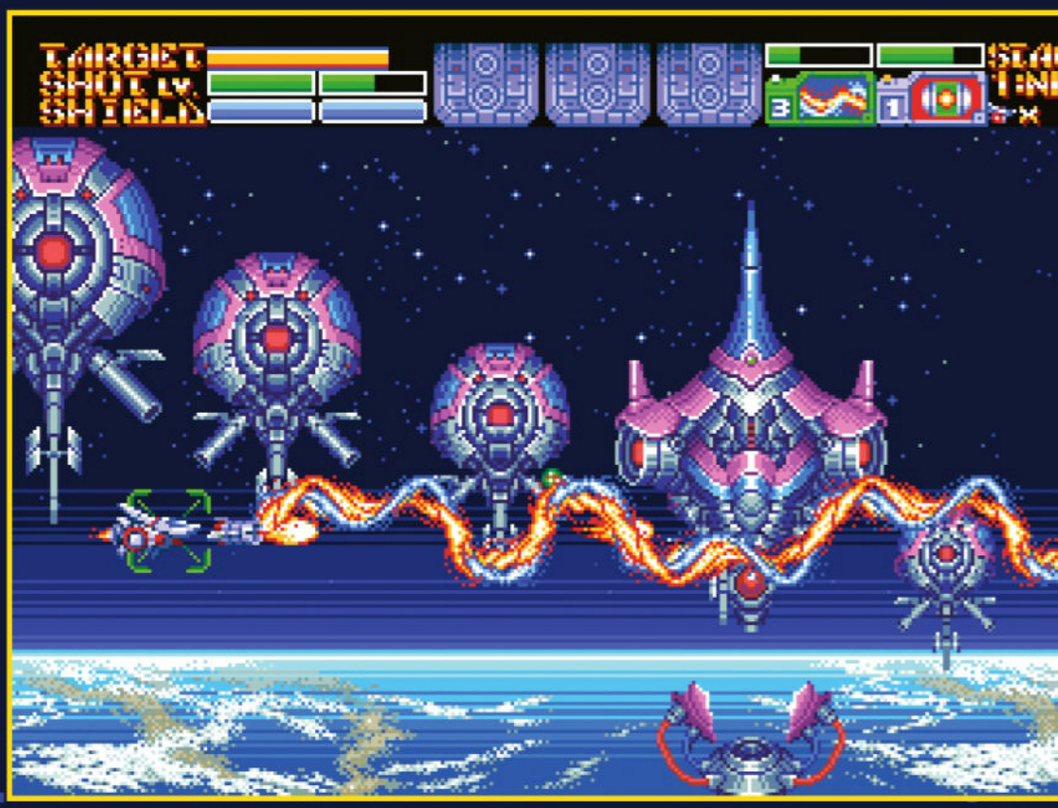
A humanoid alien form that can unleash a variety of bullets and lasers – as well as an undersized black hole.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

After destroying a large tower with three weak points, you face the final boss. The main issue with this one is that black hole – pull away hard from when it activates.

» [PC] We're not sure why a goat stars in *Earthion*. But it's great source material for head-canon musing.

» [PC] *Earthion* includes sincere and playful display settings – 'Bad CRT' being a hilarious highlight.



MUSICAL MUSINGS

CELEBRATING THE AUDIO OF YUZO KOSHIRO

■ To say Ancient's CEO Yuzo Koshiro is a bit of a legend when it comes to game music composing might even be an understatement. So adored is his work, that on occasion he has experiences typically reserved for celebrities.

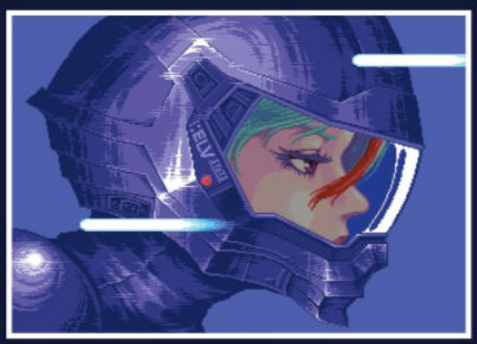
"In July 2025, we visited Brazil to promote *Earthion* at a retro gaming event," remembers Limited Run Games' Alexander Aniel, discussing a trip that he took with Koshiro. "When Koshiro arrived at passport control at the Sao Paulo airport, the immigration officer took a look at Koshiro's passport, and then his face, and then stood up and asked him, 'Are you Yuzo Koshiro?' After Koshiro affirmed his identity, the immigration officer shook his hand and then turned to his colleague in the next booth, telling her that Koshiro was the composer of *Streets Of Rage* and *Shinobi*. In my book, the work of someone who gets recognised by a random officer at a South American airport – or any airport, really – probably deserves the highest form of treatment we can offer."

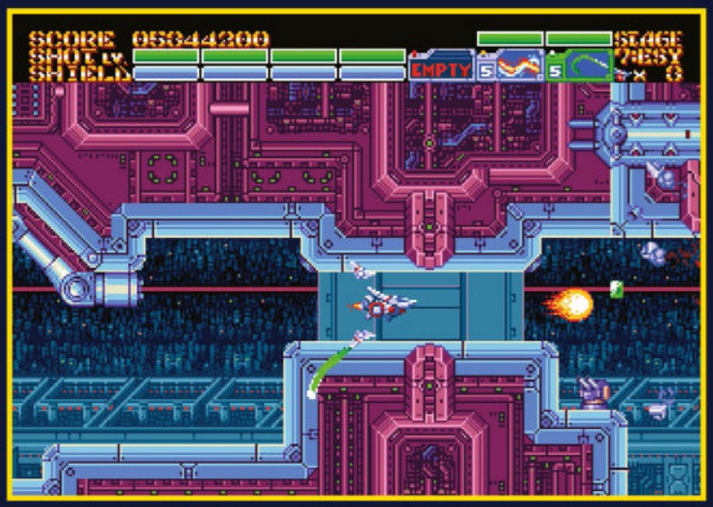
The fact is that Koshiro's work has touched many of our lives, fusing itself with gaming memories. To hear just a few notes of his compositions can whisk you away to a different time and place – a power *Earthion* is absolutely capable of delivering, thanks to the ways its music is so inherent to and tied in with the game world and systems.

"I also poured a lot of effort into the sound effects," says Koshiro. "I carefully tuned elements such as the player's shots and explosions carefully so they wouldn't clash with the music, but instead blend together as part of a cohesive audio experience. In the end, my experience in music composition allowed for there to be a sense of rhythm in my game design, while the process of making games added narrative weight and drama to the music. That kind of back-and-forth synergy is what I find most enjoyable about creating games."

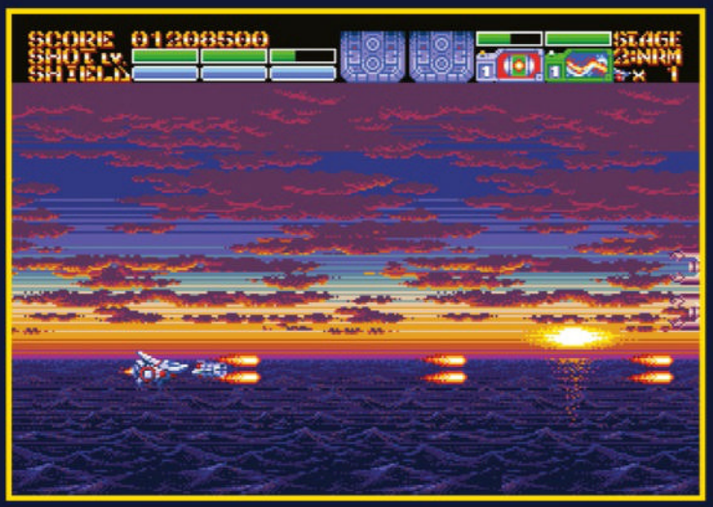
That rhythm is absolutely there in *Earthion*, delivered via a harmony of music and design that always matches the pace and tone of the action.

» [PC] It was inevitable that Yuzo Koshiro would give you a way to tweak *Earthion*'s tunes.





» [PC] Some of *Earthion*'s tighter sections deliver a sense of claustrophobia, in the *R-Type* tradition.



» [PC] In *Earthion*'s rare quiet moments, you are afforded a chance to marvel at the landscapes.

and is fairly unusual in the shooting space. It is different from the allocation system seen in the relatively obscure *G-Stream G2020*, later renamed *DeltaZeal* to align it with Triangle Service's *Trizeal* series – but comparable. And we always longed to see more games explore a slot system in ways similar to *G-Stream G2020*.

That all may sound a lot, but the game's systems achieve two things that maintain consistency of genre authenticity as well as broad appeal. Firstly, unlike the abstract alchemy of the mesmerising, intricate scrolling systems seen in the works of Cave, *Earthion*'s systems all tie to the projected physicality of the game world. Weapons and power-ups fit slots in the spacecraft. Parts of your ship are worn down through a battle, and repaired and adjusted between missions. The combat systems make sense in the game world, making them considerably easier to comprehend.

Additionally, the ship set-ups are wildly customisable, letting you adjust the game to your experience level. Newer players may want to pack as many slots as possible with shields. That means less freedom to carry multiple weapons, but that might be overwhelming for the less experienced player. The hardcore, meanwhile, may choose to risk low shields in place of weapon diversity.

"Our goal was to let players balance their slots according to their own skill level," Wada confirms. "In the shoot-'em-up genre, there can be a considerable skill gap between experienced and less experienced players. That makes balancing the game a real challenge since we have to figure out who to target. In many shooters, a single hit means instant death. While that adds a lot of tension, it can also lead to frequent power-downs for players who struggle.

"On the other hand, if you lower the overall difficulty, it risks becoming boring for skilled players. By introducing a shield and recovery system, we were able to resolve many of these issues. Giving players the ability to adjust the balance themselves added an extra layer of strategic depth and made finding your own playstyle part of the fun."

Again, first-and-foremost *Earthion* is fun. Everything else comes after that. You can get as serious as you want, but enjoyment leads the charge. As such, the game has been tremendously popular through 2025, especially considering the niche it exists in. That, of course, is in no small part thanks to Limited Run Games stepping up to publish the game digitally and physically across so many formats. The team there will also be handling the Mega Drive cart release. And according to Limited Run, supporting *Earthion* was an easy decision – and something of a personal one.

"In the past few years, we've released games such as physical versions of several Cave shooters, the legendary *Radiant Silvergun* by Treasure, and even *Sol Cresta* by PlatinumGames," enthuses Limited Run Games' business development manager for Japan and Asia, Alexander Aniel. "LRG's customers are quite loyal to shmups, and we wanted them to enjoy *Earthion* as well.

"The other big reason is that I've enjoyed working with Yuzo Koshiro on several music projects going all the way back to *Streets of Rage 4* in 2019, and I genuinely wanted to support his latest and greatest endeavour. Ancient were initially thinking of crowdfunding the game and releasing it only on the Mega Drive, without plans for other versions. LRG was in a position to spare Ancient the burden of managing a Kickstarter campaign and could offer a pathway to a modern console release, so I'm glad we were able to make it happen."

> "OUR GOAL WAS TO LET PLAYERS BALANCE THEIR SLOTS ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN SKILL LEVEL"
> **MAKOTO WADA**

The last word, however, must go to the Ancient team. "We're incredibly grateful for the positive response we've received," Wada concludes. "Since *Earthion* was developed for the Mega Drive, it's easy for people to think of it as simply a retro-style game. But we were really happy to see players appreciate the ease of play and the new ideas we tried to introduce. Even players who usually struggle with shooters have told us they were thrilled to be able to complete all the stages through repeated playthroughs." ★

Red Dead Redemption

IT'S ROOTIN' TOOTIN' GOOD

» RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2010 » ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO

If I could have been born in any period, I'd love to have been born in the days of the American Wild West. Yes, I'm fully aware that the films and TV shows I used to love as a kid were heavily romanticised and that there's a good chance I'd have probably never lived to my 30s, but the wildness and freedom of that era has always appealed to me.

From *Gunfright* on the humble Amstrad CPC to *Blood Brothers* and *Sunset Riders* in the arcade, I've always enjoyed cowboy games, and while I greatly rate the entertaining *Call Of Juarez* games (especially *Gunslinger*) *Red Dead Redemption* is in a completely different league.

Aside from its huge world map, everything about *Red Dead Redemption* feels epic in scope, from its staggeringly good soundtrack to the expansive online multiplayer mode it offers. While you can take part in all sorts of *GTA*-styled shenanigans, it's the quieter moments of the game that have always stood out to me. As enjoyable as the game's story is, *Red Dead Redemption* is at its best for me when I'm simply exploring the wilderness and soaking in the game's many grand vistas. It feels so incredibly real at times that I can almost feel the sun on my face as I ride into another sunset.

Yes, *Red Dead Redemption* is a game filled with cinematic clichés and tropes (just like the *GTA* games) but they've never bothered me like they do in that series – most likely because I love the era it's emulating so much. The game is not only designed to look and sound like the Westerns of old but it *feels* like them as well – a slice of cowboy celluloid come to life. Although I've owned the Game Of The Year edition for years now and played it through several times, I'm now waiting for the PC version to get a substantial discount so I can enjoy it all over again on my Steam Deck.

>> It's a packed issue as we go hands-on with the Analogue[3D] and tackle Metroid Prime 4: Beyond. We also get to play a bunch of Telnet games, battle through the Marvel universe and see if Terminator 2D: No Fate was worth the wait

» The Analogue[3D] doesn't come with an 8BitDo 64 pad, so keep that in mind when ordering.

Analogue[3D]

THE NINTENDO 64 GETS SUPERCHARGED

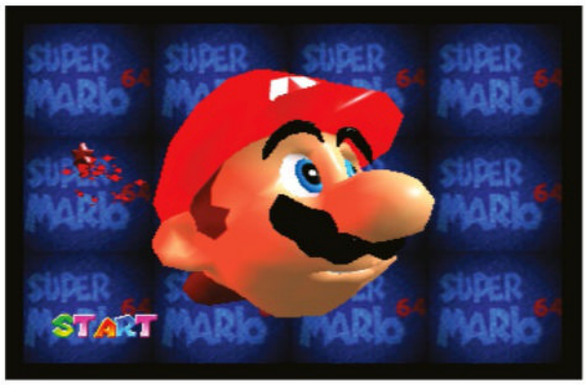
INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** $269.99 ($299.99 COLOURED VARIANTS)
- **PUBLISHER:** ANALOGUE
- **DEVELOPER:** ANALOGUE
- **BUY IT FROM:** ANALOGUE.CO

It has certainly taken a while to arrive, but we've finally had an extensive play with Analogue's latest system and it's bound to please N64 fans. If you're unaware, the Analogue[3D] is an FPGA system designed to recreate the experience of playing on an actual N64. It supports games from all three regions, comes with numerous display options, as well as an upgraded version of Analogue's OS.

The machine itself is compact and stylishly sleek, fitting in with previous Analogue designs. Initially, the machine came in two colours, white and black, although Analogue has now added eight new variants, which does feel a little off, considering the original machines have only just started arriving with customers. It supports 4K output via HDMI (but will default to 1080p if your TV doesn't support 4K), has four front ports to support traditional N64 controllers (and various modern third-party sticks) and requires an adaptor for the included USB-C power supply (we tried using one of our own chargers but couldn't draw enough power from it). It also features an SD cart slot, 2 USB-A ports, dual-band Wi-Fi and Bluetooth (both Classic and LE).

Analogue recommends updating to the latest firmware when you first turn the system on, which is straightforward and hassle free. The new OS is super clean and very easy to follow, but it's currently missing certain features like the date a new cartridge is added and how long you've been playing a game for. Pop a cart in and you're shown useful info like the developer and publisher, how many players it supports and any peripherals that can be used with it. You can also modify each game



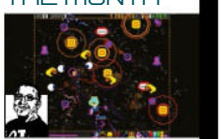
» [Analogue[3D]] Turning on De-blur and disabling anti-aliasing makes games look super sharp.

» [Analogue[3D]] Games like *Perfect Dark* run amazingly well using the Analogue[3D]'s Unleashed setting. It's almost like experiencing a new game.

» [Analogue[3D]] The various scanline options look great. We particularly like using the PVM option.

» [Analogue[3D]] Using the - button on the new 8BitDo 64 pads effortlessly switches between the Controller Pak and Rumble Pak.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Evil Egg

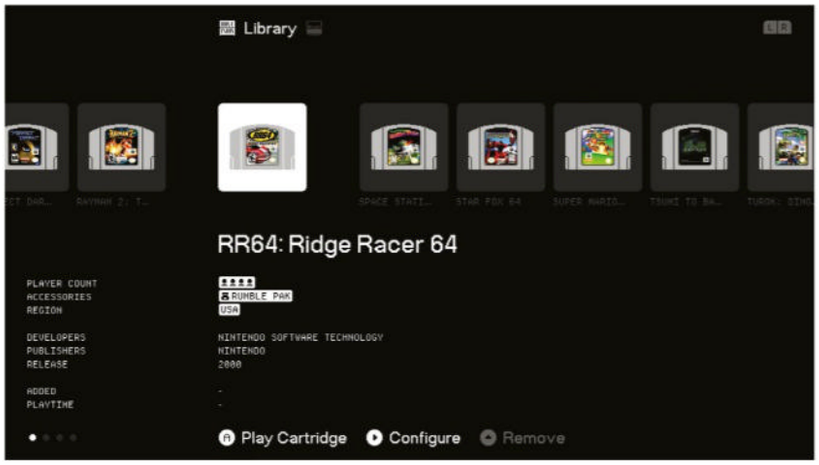
Nick recommended this free Steam game to me a few short days before he passed. Playing it has given me a huge amount of comfort.

TIM

Deep Rock Galactic: Survivor

I've been playing this a lot and it's really great fun. I'm now on 391 Dives and still haven't completed all of the final levels.

» [Analogue3D] We really hope Analogue improves the system's de-interlacing, as the combing effect looks pretty terrible.



» [Analogue3D] These cool-looking cart images were exclusive to review units, but they're easily found online.

on a case by case basis, although you can't currently apply these changes to all other games.

The display and hardware options are really impressive, with a few caveats. There's a selection of filters that include BVM, PVM, CRT and Scanlines, or you can simply use Clean, which displays a raw output for purists or those used to playing on emulators. You can add options like De-blur to sharpen the image, boost 32-bit colour and use scaling options to increase the size of the displayed image or even stretch it to fill your TV screen (although we personally don't like this option). The only downside we've found is that interlaced games (eg, typically those using the Expansion Pak's hi-res mode) look very ugly.

While the new OS is super slick and the display options are extremely impressive it's the Overclock mode that is the machine's true trump card. Initially set to Auto by default, it actually has a number of options. Enhanced boosts the RAM speed of the system, Enhanced+ boosts RAM and GPU speed, while Unleashed does RAM, GPU and CPU. The results, particularly when using Unleashed are transformative, with games like *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Gauntlet Legends* getting massive framerate boosts over the original versions. You can't play a game at 30fps or 60fps if that option wasn't there to begin with of course, but it's staggering how good games like *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness* now run.

It's worth noting that some games have timing issues or can even crash when using the Overclock mode, but we've played over 35 games so far and not noticed any major issues. Rare's back catalogue in particular benefits from Unleashed, particularly the likes of *GoldenEye 007*, *Killer Instinct Gold* and *Banjo-Tooie*.

One aspect of the Analogue3D that isn't perfect is its overall compatibility with Everdrive cartridges. While there's recently been a fix by Krikkz to update some of the newer models like the Everdrive 64 X range, we've still seen various issues online. Our older V2 model refused to work until we updated it with a more-recent build, so keep these compatibility issues in mind if you don't fancy digging your old N64 cartridges out of the loft. There's every chance that the Analogue3D will be jailbroken like earlier devices, but there's been no news about that yet. Saving games to the SD card would also be nice.

It's also a shame it doesn't ship with the new 8BitDo 64 pads, because they add an extra $39.99 to the overall cost of the machine. The quality of them is extremely good (moreso after an update) and we've experienced no issues with the four pads Analogue sent to us. Overall, the few Bluetooth controllers we tested worked, but we've largely been using the classic N64 sticks for a more authentic feel. And it's the authenticity of the Analogue3D that truly impresses us. It feels like you're playing on an actual N64, with the Overclock mode taking the old system to another level. Yes it will be highly priced for some, and yes Analogue really needs to get its production better to meet the high demand of its products, but this is a great bit of kit, which has transformed Nintendo's console for us. ✱

In a nutshell

It's not cheap (after postage and customs) and there are kinks to iron out, but we'd argue the Analogue3D is absolutely worth owning due to its exceptional Overclock mode.

» [Analogue3D] All the PAL and Japanese games we tested ran fine, with the usual PAL optimisation issues.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Terminator 2D: No Fate

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, PS5, Switch 2, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X
» **Buy it for:** £24.99 (digital), £44.99+ (physical) » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

After facing numerous delays, Bitmap Bureau's *Terminator* game is finally with us and it doesn't disappoint. While *Terminator 2D* features several different game mechanics and ideas, it's ostensibly a run-and-gun at heart, with a focus on smooth, fast-paced action and exhilarating boss fights.

Interestingly, and perhaps disappointingly, there are very few sections where you play as the actual Terminator; instead you're cast as Sarah or John Connor and partake in numerous levels, either culled from the film or simply inspired by it.

It's a brief experience with the core game taking just only an hour to complete, but there's plenty of replay value thanks to alternate levels and some decent extras, including a rather hectic Boss Rush.

The game itself looks fantastic, with lavish pixel art, detailed environments and some stylish, evocative cutscenes, but it's perhaps the game's atmospheric soundtrack that really pulls everything together. There are some brilliant remixes of Brad Fiedel's memorable score and it really adds to the overall experience.

The game's boss fights are another standout part of the game (providing you play on a higher difficulty level) with some intense mayors that put up quite the fight before they're defeated. Sadly, there's only a few levels where you're stalked by the T-1000 and while they're well executed, they're over far too soon.

As fun as *Terminator 2D* is, it offers virtually no challenge on its standard difficulty level, and that short runtime will definitely irk some gamers. The much-touted ability to change the game's outcome feels a little rushed and it's a shame that Bitmap couldn't get Arnie's likeness, but these are minor issues. When it comes to aping the 16-bit run-and-guns of old, Bitmap has absolutely killed it (or should that be terminated it?).

» **Score 80%**

» [PC] Sections like these are great fun to play, but over far too soon

» [PC] The fighting mechanics are solid, so it's a shame they're rarely used.

» [PC] The boss fights are actually one of *Terminator 2D*'s highlights, providing you play on a higher difficulty level.

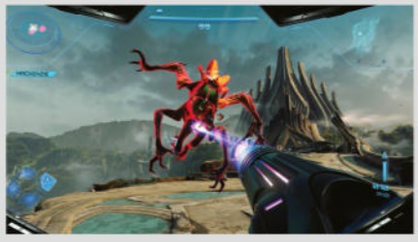
Telenet Shooting Collection

» **System:** PC » **Buy it for:** £4.29+ (single game), £14.59+ (four games)
» **Buy it from:** Online

Shooting fans get four great blasters here, including the Mega Drive gems *Gaiares* and *Granada X,* and the PC Engine releases *Avenger* and *Psychic Storm.* While there's no denying that the four included games are very enjoyable, this new compilation from Edia Co is incredibly barebones, being a simple free launcher that you run the games from. The emulation is great, but everything else feels rather minimal, from the scanned manuals, iOS-style presentation and the fact there are very few tweakable options. Analogue controls are currently pointless as you can't move in eight directions, while there are no CRT options of any kind. The games are great, but the presentation is extremely lacking.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 65%**



Metroid Prime 4: Beyond

» **System:** Switch 2 (tested), Switch
» **Buy it for:** £49.99 (Switch), £58.99 (Switch 2)
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Nintendo's flagship Christmas release is a crushing disappointment that fails to reach the highs of the series' first three games. While it looks spectacular and controls extremely well, it's a surprisingly pedestrian outing for the fearless Samus Aran thanks to a bland, open world, forgettable NPCs, simple boss fights and generally poor level design that feels a world away from the tightness of the earlier games. The new psychic abilities bring little to the table, Samus' new bike just isn't that fun to use and the first several hours are a real slog to get through. It does improve significantly once you reach the cold realm of Ice Belt, but this is quite the fall from grace for the acclaimed series.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 68%**

Marvel Cosmic Invasion

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, PS5, Switch, Switch 2, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £24.99+
» **Buy it from:** Online

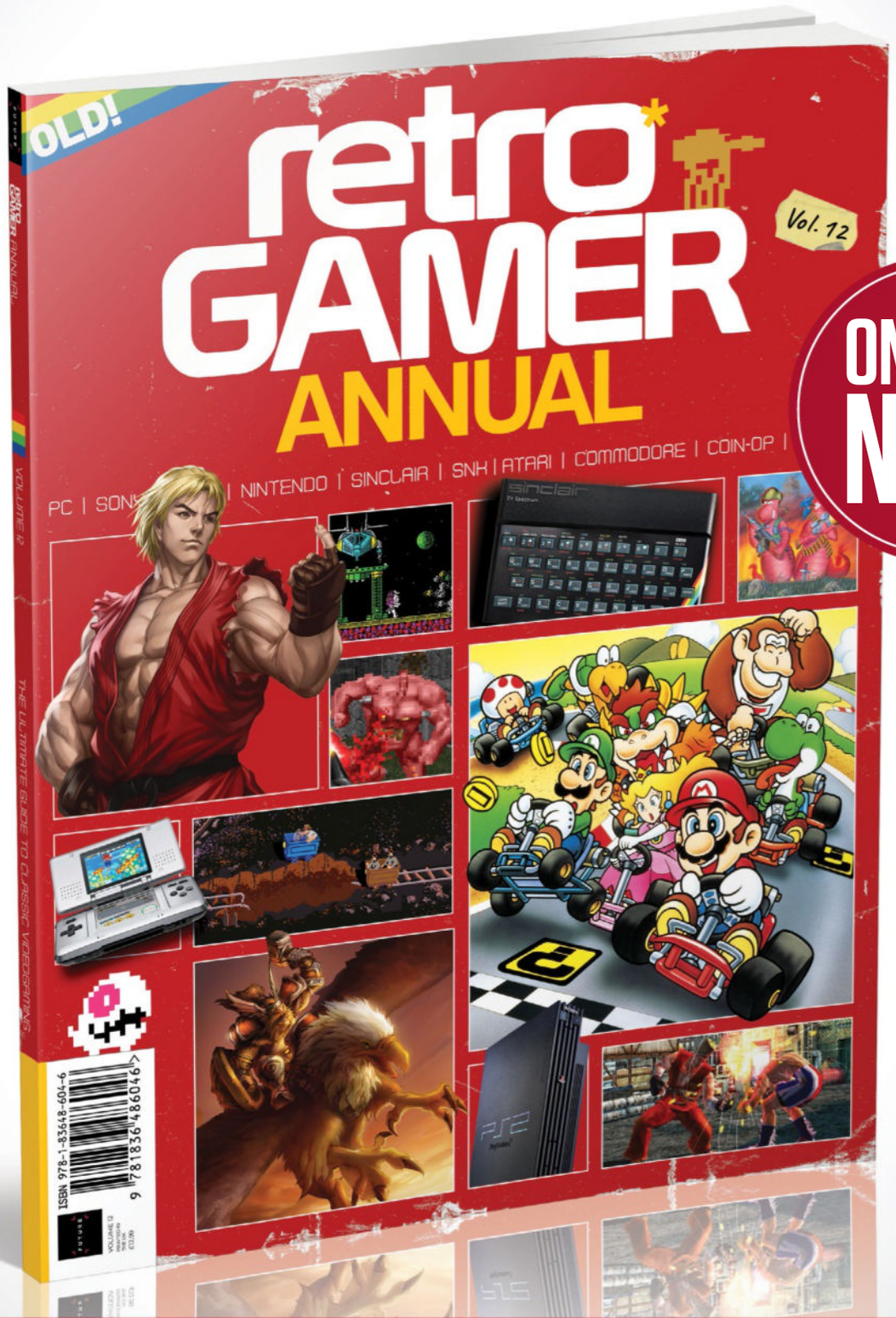
It's great to see scrolling fighters back in vogue and *Cosmic Invasion* is a really good one. After reinvigorating the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* with *Shredder's Revenge,* Tribute Games has now tackled Marvel's Annihilation storyline and married it to a kinetic fighting engine. The 15-strong roster of characters range from well-known faces like Spider-Man and Wolverine to Nova and Beta Ray Bill and they all play very differently to each other. The tag-team mechanics are well implemented and it's fun switching characters in and out to build up giant combos. It suffers from some harsh difficulty spikes and gets rather chaotic with four players, but it remains tremendous fun and offers a silly amount of replay value.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 88%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2025

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!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THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- CODE FRAGMENTS EXPLAIN HOW TO PROGRAM, SUCH AS USING BOOLEAN OPERATORS. --->

<!--- CERTAIN LESSONS ARE PRESENTED AS "SIDE QUESTS" AS YOU LEVEL UP YOUR SKILLS. --->

<!--- THE NERDYTEACHERS APPEAR IN CARTOON FORM ACROSS THE WEBSITE AND YOUTUBE CHANNEL. --->

<INTRO> PERSEVERANCE CAN BE AN IMPORTANT SKILL IN MAKING HOMEBREW. CONDENSE TEAM HAVE SPENT SEVEN YEARS CREATING SONIC GX (AMSTRAD PLUS/GX4000); WE'LL GIVE IT A FULL REVIEW NEXT TIME, BUT YOU CAN DOWNLOAD IT AT BIT.LY/SONICGX-CPCPLUS MEANWHILE, IN THIS ISSUE, YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT PICO-8 CODING FROM THE NERDYTEACHERS, MEET A SWEDISH SEUCK GURU, LOOK FORWARD TO A CLEVER MIX OF PINBALL AND PLATFORMER, AND CHECK OUT THREE VERY VARIED GAMES IN THE REVIEWS. </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

TERRIFIC TUTORS

<INTRO> THE NERDYTEACHERS WEBSITE (BIT.LY/NERDYTEACHERS) HAS GREAT RESOURCES FOR THOSE WANTING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PICO-8 FANTASY CONSOLE </INTRO>

<BODY> **The NerdyTeachers explain their name and the website's origins.** "It was a blog site that I made with my wife, also a teacher, where we shared our broad nerdy interests related to classroom technologies, crafts, games, and more. NerdyTeachers has become my alias everywhere" After trying other game engines, they found PICO-8. "PICO-8 checked off every requirement: low barrier to entry, 2D only, all-in-one software, cute and vibrant, simple interface, fast and easy to create art and music, and provides immediate feedback. I just fell in love, and so did my students. I started making videos about using PICO-8 and nervously shared them. The community was so welcoming that they ignited my passion to build tutorials and make them available online for students far beyond my classroom." The videos are at youtube.com/@NerdyTeachers

PICO-8 POSSIBILITIES

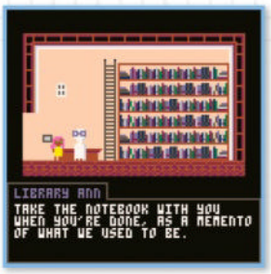
<INTRO> THE NERDYTEACHERS PICK FIVE CLEVER PICO-8 TITLES YOU MAY HAVE OVERLOOKED </INTRO>

SORTED INC.
(voidgazerBon)

<"A high-stress resource-organising game that gives my brain the perfect task of balancing order and chaos." />

TMNT: SHREDDER'S PREVENGE (Wolfe3D)

<"An impressive long-term development project that is fun to play and extraordinary to peek under the hood." />



LAST WORDS
(sonmule)

<"An amazing example of managing to fit a meaningful story in a small world with minimal dialogue." />

GO-GO GARDEN
(MarinaMakes)

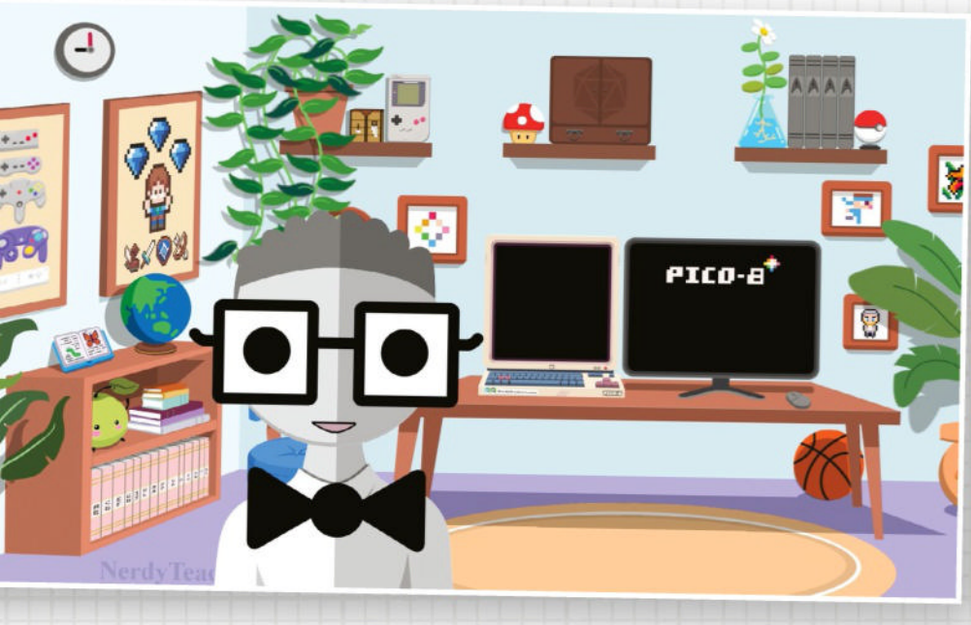
<"Real-time simulation in a PICO-8 game, where you simply grow cute pixel plants little by little each day." />

PICODEX
(alanxoc3)

<"A huge amount of art and data is squeezed into a single PICO-8 cart", giving a clever 'Pokedex' experience. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM WHERE THE NERDYTEACHERS INSPIRE VIEWERS TO PROGRAM WITH THE PICO-8. --->

<!--- THIS YOUTUBE EPISODE EXPLAINS HOW TO CREATE A HEALTH BAR --->

<!--- [PICO-8] "KALIKAN BY LOUIECHAPM IS THE ONLY SHMUP THAT I KEEP WANTING TO PLAY AGAIN AND AGAIN," SAYS NERDYTEACHERS. --->

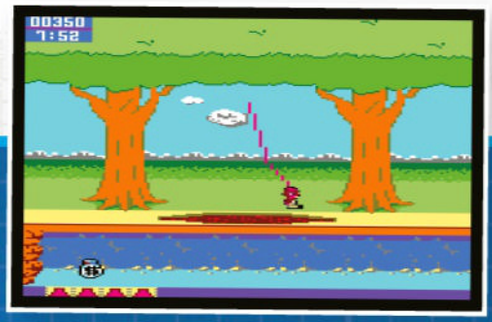
<!--- RUNNING SINCE JANUARY 2023, THE PICO-VIEW FANZINE FEATURES BESPOKE GRAPHICS AND FASCINATING ARTICLES. --->

The Pico-View webzine (bit.ly/picoview) became another valuable aspect. "Marina was new to the community but was a prolific creator with their own unique style. They were one of the first to join the NerdyTeachers Discord, and they had been doing interviews with PICO-8 developers. It grew and grew over the months into full-blown articles, game reviews, and sharing tips and tricks. I took over with help from regular contributors and the goal of 12 issues in 2023, which we achieved! We scaled back to quarterly and now annually. Pico-View is a great way to see how deep you can get into PICO-8 game dev and feel the passion from the wonderful community."

With over 16,000 PICO-8 games already available, finding something new to play can be tricky. "We built our curated list at bit.ly/curated-p8 based on the community ratings. We update our list in December each year, adding the newest games that qualify and updating the ratings for the whole catalogue. That allows us to announce the top ten games of the year. Then we update our lists of top 200 games from several time frames: past one year, three years, five years, and all time."

The NerdyTeachers have advice for newcomers. "As a player, prepare to jump into an ocean of fun games, building your own personal library. As a developer, prepare for a highly rewarding journey, with emphasis on the journey. That's why I present PICO-8 game dev as an Adventure RPG. Each step gains you more experience and better tools, and you are levelling up with each challenge." The site is ad-free and gives away PICO-8 downloads, supported by the members and the Ko-Fi page at ko-fi.com/nerdyteachers

The PICO-8 community is important to NerdyTeachers. "There are so many ways to interact with the community because game development brings so many diverse creatives together, and I get the most joy out of supporting this community in as many ways as I can." </BODY>



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: Zooperdan has been busy, releasing new games *Yeet*, *Blok* and *Wordz*. Check out zooperdan.itch.io for more info.

Amstrad CPC: 21bloques has created a great conversion of Sega's 1984 game *Pitfall 2* (above). Swing on over to bit.ly/pitfall2-cpc

Commodore 16: *Green Beret C16* by Arlasoft is a reworked conversion of the classic coin-op. Get flaming over at bit.ly/greenberet-c16

Commodore 64: Iapetus (our Champion Coder in **RG** 276) released *Zezito In The Glittering Caves*, where you must paint all the platforms. You'll find it at bit.ly/zezito-c64 and it's also on the Thomson MO5 at bit.ly/glittering-mo5

Game Boy: *Pandora's Blocks* is a heavily customisable falling blocks game from Villadelfia, inspired by the *Tetris Grand Master* series, for DMG and Color. Puzzle away by visiting bit.ly/pandora-gameboy

Mega Drive: PSCD Games has made downloads of *BattleWomen*, *Thunder Paw*, *Foxyland*, and *Alien Cat 2* free. Check them all out at pscdgames.itch.io

Sinclair Next: Mike Dailly's CSpect emulator is now only available to supporters of his Patreon at patreon.com/mikedailly
The Next can be emulated in the most recent version of MAME (mamedev.org)

PC Engine: Don't lose your marbles in the board game *Kex* from Newsdee, with music by VodSound. Head over to bit.ly/kex-pcengine

Plus/4: The Hungarian Game Dev Competition 2025/2026 runs until the 31 March, and is open to Basic, Basic++, and Assembly entries. You'll find it at plus4gamedev.hu

TIC-80: Keep the residents happy in the city-building simulation *Urbanity* from the Plush Girls. Get planning at bit.ly/urbanity-tic80

Vic-20: *Video Chess* is Aleksi Eeben's port of Larry Wagner & Bob Whitehead's Atari 2600 game for unexpanded Vic. bit.ly/chess-vic

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

ALF YNGVE

<INTRO> ALF HAS CREATED OVER 100 GAMES USING THE C64'S SHOOT 'EM UP CONSTRUCTION KIT. </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: SWEDEN WEBSITE: ARYNGVE.COM FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
PREVIOUS GAME: CAPTAIN ISHTAR VS THE FEDERATION'S MOST WANTED
WORKING ON: CAPTAIN ISHTAR IN THE FORTRESS OF FEAR, AND A TWIN TIGERS SEQUEL />

DO YOU PLAN YOUR GAMES BEFORE CREATING THEM?

<I fill notebooks with sketches, schematics of game mechanics, enemy movement patterns, drawings of sprites, backgrounds, cutscenes… and I write plots and in-game text. A crucial part of the planning stage is to test the basic game mechanics – to make sure that gameplay will be functional and glitch-free. />

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE ENHANCEMENTS TO YOUR GAMES?

<Linked player controls have opened up various design opportunities – for instance, *Operation Firestorm* or my *Double Or Nothing* games. Martin Piper's SEUCK Redux framework has been great for me, as it has boosted technical performance and allows for enemies to take aim at the player. I'm learning to use a cool new POKE code that makes enemy movements loop and repeat. And the great soundtracks that Richard Bayliss composed for many of my games also count as enhancements! They add so much mood and engagement. />

WHAT GAMES INSPIRED THE CAPTAIN ISHTAR SERIES?

<*Game Over*, *Xain D'Sleena* (arcade) and the C64 version of *Flash Gordon*. The intent was to create a fun space opera adventure (and to deliver the experience that *Game Over* promised but failed to deliver). />

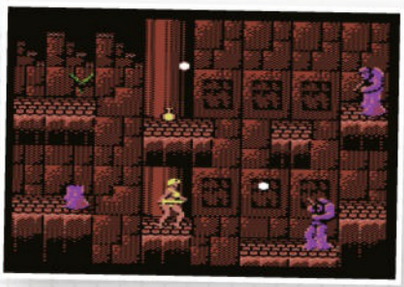
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN CAPTAIN ISHTAR 3?

<Varied gameplay, and things I haven't done before – such as a proper platform stage with gravity and jumping. There will be a '3D' driving segment using very large sprites. There are also many cutscenes, and I've tried to avoid making each stage too long. Captain Ishtar herself gets more space to be a character. />

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO REMAKE TWIN TIGERS?

<I had practically forgotten that game… until someone begged me to do a remake/sequel. I usually only do that if I'm certain it can be made better than the original. And in this case, lots of improvements are possible. This sequel will be more intense, enemies will be more interesting, and backgrounds will use hi-res mode plus animation. />

<!--- [C64] PREQUEL CAPTAIN ISHTAR BEGINS FEATURED HUGE, EXPANDED SPRITES AND CITY DOMES THAT YOU MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO DAMAGE. --->



<!--- [C64] THIS CAPTAIN ISHTAR 3 PREVIEW SHOT SHOWS HER ARMED WITH A SWORD, JUMPING BETWEEN PLATFORMS. --->

<!--- [C64] THE TWIN TIGERS SEQUEL WILL FEATURE ANIMATED BACKGROUND DETAILS, COLLISIONS WITH TALL PARTS OF THE SCENERY, AND MUSIC BY RICHARD BAYLISS. --->

DATA BURST

CHEW CHEW MIMIC

<INFO FORMAT: DREAMCAST (REVIEWED), STEAM, NES CREDITS: RIGG'D GAMES (ORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT), LOWTEK GAMES (CONVERSION), ORCFACE GAMES (PUBLISHER) PRICE: PHYSICAL CD £7.50 PLUS POSTAGE, DIGITAL DOWNLOAD £9 (INCLUDES SOUNDTRACK & MANUAL PDF)
WEB: ORCFACE.COM/CHEW-CHEW-MIMIC />

<BODY> **Four hapless knights go in search of treasure chests but only find the nasty knight-devouring Mimics.** Yellow Knight turns left at walls and falls down holes, while Red Knight won't fall in holes but turns right at them and walls. Blue Knight jumps over holes and turns back at walls, while Green Knight can push boxes, falls through cracked floors (which become holes when walked on once) and turns left at walls. The player can deploy black arrows to force a Knight in that direction, while yellow arrows only work once. Springs let the Knights jump over one space, while boxes act as an obstacle that makes the Knights turn. Existing arrows and boxes can be moved. Each level contains three Coins; the more collected, the better the ending (with three possible endings). Later levels introduce keys that are required to unlock doors and multiple knights to manage. Enemies to avoid include Goblins, Skeletons, Bats and Snakes. Completing a level gives a password, entered on the title screen. The excellent physical CD comes with a QR code for downloading the digital files. Mixing *Sokoban* with *Chu Chu Rocket* results in a brain-twisting game with an excellent soundtrack and humourous cutscenes. The gradually increasing difficulty curve makes this a must for puzzle fans. </BODY>

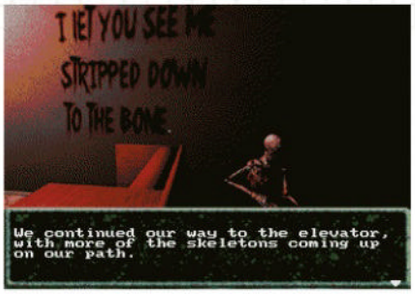
SCORE: 88%

<!--- [DREAMCAST] CLEVER USE OF THE SPRING AND CRATE WILL LET YOU COLLECT ALL THREE COINS BEFORE RED KNIGHT REACHES THE MIMIC. --->

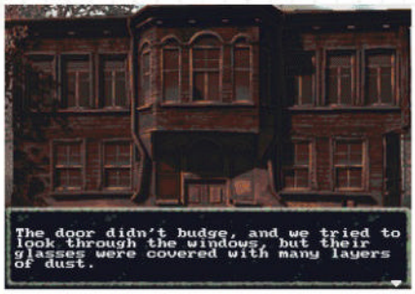
<!--- [DREAMCAST] SKELETONS AND GOBLINS KILL ON CONTACT, WHILE SNAKES AND BATS FIRST REMOVE YOUR ARMOUR. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**


I BET YOU SEE ME
STRIPPED DOWN
TO THE BONE.
We continued our way to the elevator, with more of the skeletons coming up on our path.

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] BEWARE, SOME SKELETONS IN THE GAME HAVE BEEN REANIMATED AND WILL ATTACK YOU. --->



<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] EXPLORING THE MANSION WILL REVEAL AN IMPORTANT HIDDEN AREA - IF YOU SURVIVE TO FIND IT. --->

SACRED LINE III

<INFO FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE CREDITS: SASHA DARKO PRICE: $14.99 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD)
WEB: BIT.LY/SACRED3-MEGADRIVE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / SASHADARKO.COM/SACRED-LINE-III/ (PHYSICAL PREORDERS) />

<BODY> **If you've not played the earlier games in the Sacred Line series, there's no need to worry. The "Previously On *Sacred Line*" menu tells you what happened to sisters Ellen and Sarah from war-torn former Yugoslavia as they battled against an ancient cult.** This visual novel features atmospheric graphics and a distinctive, moody soundtrack as the sisters make their way back to the cult's village headquarters. Checkpoints help you make progress, while dice rolls will decide your fate in combat. The sisters will need a portal to take them back in time from 1999 to 1366 to unlock the secrets that can end the cult and the power behind it. This horror-based game is certainly not suitable for younger players and may even chill seasoned horror fans. </BODY>

SCORE: 80%

<!--- [BBC MICRO] THE ENEMY SAUCER CASTS A SHADOW ON THE LANDSCAPE. --->

<!--- [BBC MICRO] WE WILL TALK TO PROGRAMMER ANGUS HUGHES IN THE NEXT ISSUE ABOUT HOW HE ACHIEVED THIS NEAT 3D EFFECT. --->

ORION PATROL

<INFO FORMAT: BBC MICRO CREDITS: ANGUS HUGHES PRICE: FREE
WEB: BIT.LY/ORIONPATROL-BBC />

<BODY> **Inspired by the classic Archimedes game *Zarch* (*Virus* on the ST/Amiga), your Cobra Mk 1 fighter moves by tilting and rotating, then firing the main thruster.** Landing on your starting pad gives extra energy, which is depleted by enemy attacks and using your thrust. The radar map shows patrolling enemy ships and eliminating them all moves you onto the next level; you'll also need to avoid ground-based gun turrets. It takes time to perfect control of the ship, but the superb 3D effect is impressive for the hardware in this very likeable game. </BODY>

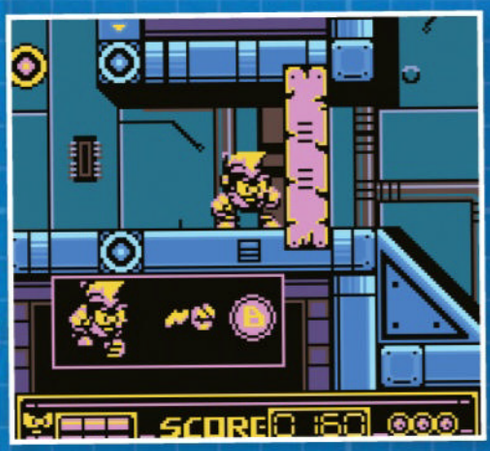
SCORE: 84%

PROCESSING

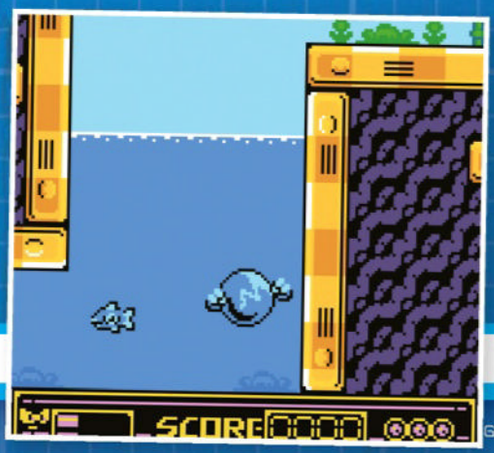
<INTRO> PEARACIDIC IS MIXING PINBALL AND PLATFORMERS WITH BUZZ BUMPER IN PLANET PINBALL FOR THE GAME BOY COLOR </INTRO>

<BODY> **Designer Britt Brady reveals key influences.** "*Sonic Spinball*, *Kirby's Dream Land*, *Wario Land*, my previous work, and mascot platformers in general. I'm taking pinball aesthetics and letting them drive the mechanics and worldbuilding of a platformer." Development is in GBStudio, with the help of Pearacidic. "I make the graphics in Pyxel Edit; I draw everything in monochromatic colour and then apply a Master System–style palette to individual elements inside the engine. Music is being made by ZBW in Hugetracker."

"We want to add a lot more interactive mechanics," continues Britt. "Flippers, wireforms/ziplines, scoop cannons, anything else that sounds fun. We're also talking about special stages, such as a surfboard section, along with adding coins or other collectables. [Currently, there are hidden letters to spell TILT in each level. – Andrew] A physical release is one of the main driving forces. I've been messing with Game Boy stuff for about two years now, and it's a dream of mine to have at least one physical release." Follow the project at bit.ly/buzzbumper </BODY>



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] BUZZ CAN PUNCH THROUGH THIS BARRIER OR GRAB THE BUMPER: CERTAIN BARRIERS DROP WHEN ALL LOCAL BUMPERS ARE LIT. --->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

MAGAZINES OF YESTERYEAR

Tim and Darran look back at early gaming mags

DARRAN JONES

TIM EMPEY

Magazine Craft has become such a popular part of the mag that it's encouraged the team to look back to the games magazines they used to enjoy reading as youngsters. With Andy way too busy designing, you're stuck with the musings of Darran and Tim.

DARRAN

So what's the first games magazine you can ever remember reading, Tim?

TIM

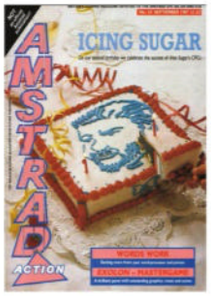
I'm pretty sure it was *Commodore User* or *Zzap!64*. I used to pore over them while eating breakfast. What about yourself, Darran?

DARRAN

I didn't get an Amstrad CPC until my 14th birthday so I would have largely flicked through the likes of *CVG* in our local Sperrings, or read issues of *Your Sinclair* and *Crash* at my mate's house. What did you like about those early issues?

TIM

Mostly the writing and seeing all the screenshots. I slightly still remember one caption from a *World Games* review that was going on about Ferdinand The Bull, for some reason. I was pretty much sticking to single-format mags for the C64 and Amiga, so it was years before I delved into *CVG* and other multiformat ones. I then started buying Sega mags when I bought a Mega Drive in 1994.



» *Amstrad Action* became Darran's single-format magazine of choice after receiving the machine for his 14th birthday.

DARRAN

One of the things for me was how cool everyone seemed. Working on a mag seemed like a dream job and it felt like these writers were your mates. I must admit, I did like the many covertapes you'd get as well. Did you have any favourites?

TIM

I honestly can't remember any covertapes, did *CU* even do them? I sort of remember some coverdisks, but I might be getting confused with some freeware stuff swapped between friends. Like there was one where you basically tortured people with chainsaws and the like. There was pixilated blood flying everywhere!

DARRAN

That sounds absolutely brutal, mate. The ones that stick out to me are *Batty*, which came with *Your Sinclair*, the *Moley Christmas* tape and the *Cannon Soccer* one with *Amiga Power*. I think I was more into console mags as I was working by then and had my own cash. Were you a fan of *Mean Machines* at all?

TIM

Yep, I bought many issues of *Mean Machines*, though maybe not that many as it only lasted two years, but it was a very good mag and pretty funny too. I did go through a period of trying out most of the Sega magazines back then.

» *Mean Machines* was very popular and eventually evolved into two separate magazines.

DARRAN

I loved *Mean Machines*, it felt like a natural evolution of the old Newsfield mags (which makes sense when you consider who worked on it). I still remember the first issue with *TMNT*'s Leonardo on the cover and would love to own them all again. Have you actually kept any old mags, either ones you've worked on or ones you enjoyed reading?

TIM

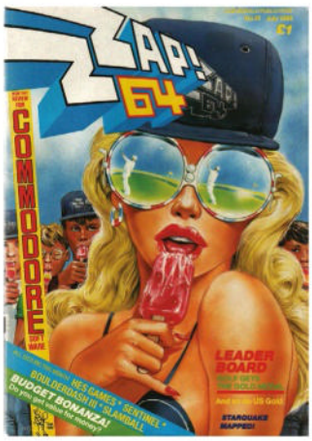
Do you remember *Maximum*? It's the 15th best videogame mag of all time according to *The Guardian* (we're the 14th). Anyway, I had each issue – not too difficult as there were only eight of them. I loved that mag, especially the *Tekken 2* one with all the movelists, and was gutted when a new one didn't appear in the shops after it closed. Anyway, I chucked them when I moved to Belfast, like an eejit. I have carted about all the *Cube* mags I worked on with me since then. I've got a few issues of *Play* and *360* as well. You've got a magazine collection right?

DARRAN

Funnily enough, *Maximum* inspired the Ultimate Guide in

» Tim loved *Maximum* magazine. Its detailed, in-depth spreads actually inspired our own Ultimate Guides.

» Here's Tim's old cover featuring the misspelled *Twilight Princess*. *Twiglet Princess* would have been far funnier.



» *Zzap!64* was one of the first games mags Tim read, although he can't remember the issue he started from.

» Darran was a big fan of the arcades as a kid, so loved this section of *CVG*.

> "Do you remember Maximum? It's the 15th best videogame mag of all time according to The Guardian"
>
> TIM EMPEY

the magazine. I know it's not quite as in-depth but the aim was to try and explore every possible angle of a popular game like *Maximum* did. I've got all of **Retro Gamer** (just missing the *Resi 4* cover as I accidentally gave it away) and a complete set of *N64 Magazine* as well. Oh and Graeme Mason gave me a huge lot of N64-era *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which I still have. Do any old covers stick in your mind at all? Like *The Twiglet Princess*?

TIM

Oh you dick! I wake up at night thinking about that still. For those reading: it was issue 47 of *Cube*, a cover hit with "*The Legend Of Zelda:* ***Twilght*** *Princess*" on it. I didn't spot it, Miles didn't spot it, Chandra didn't spot it, Lewis flipping typed it that way, and the group editor didn't spot it. And so it got printed like that. And Liz then took the piss out of me in the next issue with a cartoon of Zelda looking like a Twiglet. Bloody nightmare. What's your best/ worst typo?

DARRAN

So on **Retro Gamer** issue 130 we had 'Amesome' rather than 'Awesome' on the cover and there's an early issue that has a giant post-it note in the top ten Mega-CD feature. Issue 19 was a bit of a car crash for errors too, due to it being a two-week issue with no sub editor. Did you ever trust reviews? I used to buy all the games *Arcade* recommended in its top 20 lists.

TIM

Yeah I trusted reviews generally, I could usually tell if I'd enjoy a game even without them though. I did buy *Dark Chronicle* because *Play* gave it something stupid like 98%. It didn't deserve 98… maybe 92.

DARRAN

I gave *Super Mario Galaxy 2* 100% in this very mag, so what do I know about scores!

» Darran loved *Arcade*'s The A-List charts, feeling you couldn't go wrong with any of its picks.

» Darran forgot to mention *Super Play*, even though it was his SNES magazine of choice. Wil Overton's covers were superb.

READERS REACT

You share your favourite old mags with us

acco-san

Your Sinclair. It taught me you can love something AND take the piss out of it. That oddballs CAN find their tribe. That subversion IS an art form. And, did it not somehow become a classic games magazine in its own lifetime?

Warren Pilkington

Zzap!64. It told it like it was for Commodore 64 games, and the number of writers still going strong in the industry is testament to its style, content, reviews and tips.

Sophie Rose Music

Commodore Format. I loved flicking through and deciding what to spend my hard-earned pocket money on, sometimes I'd even be able to afford a £2.99 beauty. Good times.

SP24

EGM. Talented writers. Geared toward young adults. Fair and balanced. No Nintendo bias.

Anonymous X

Amiga Power: influenced by the music press (*Smash Hits* et al) and Gonzo journalism, and the best of the Spectrum magazines. Properly critical games reviews, to the ire of several major publishers.

Grace E

It's got to be *Crash*, which resonated instantly with me. There was a certain energy about it, which (paradoxically, perhaps, in my case) made it feel like a breath of fresh air when I first discovered it.

Leina

Sega Saturn Magazine. Even in its dying days, when it was clear Saturn owners were getting screwed, their enthusiasm for the machine and its games was infectious

Michal Nemec

Well let me take you to the early Nineties, fresh, post-communist Czechoslovakia. It must be *Excalibur*, one of the first, considered today a classic games magazine. It was the sheer number of games you knew your local provider could have. The wild beginnings of games journalism in Czechia and Slovakia.

Cylus Resi

It has to be *GamesMaster.* Not only was the TV show epic for a gaming pre-teen, but the magazine had the same vibe. I used to tear out the cheat/hints pages and keep them in the Mega Drive game cases. Actually, I might start doing the same with **Retro Gamer** articles.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

TIFA LOCKHEART RESIN STATUE

"Made by Mayflies Studios, this was a gift for my wife and imported from China. It's 25-inches in height, very heavy and gorgeous."

AMOUNT PAID: $399

SUPER FAMICOM CONSOLE

"A friend bought this in Japan, and it's the best way to play *Turtles In Time*."

AMOUNT PAID: GIFT

MARVEL VS CAPCOM TOURNAMENT EDITION FIGHTSTICK

"MadCatz made great sticks in this era, and I think this was their prettiest."

AMOUNT PAID: $150

BIO

NAME:
Will Borger

LOCATION:
New York, USA

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$15,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Sega Dreamcast

FAVOURITE GAME:
Star Wars Trilogy Arcade

YOUTUBE:
@edgarallanbro

TANGIBLE JOY

Will Borger seeks the weird and wonderful in an increasingly digital world

Words by James Tocchio

For Will Borger, a writer covering games, collecting was an inherited trait. "I grew up in a family in which collecting was normal," he tells us. "By the time my grandfather died, he had 14 cars, half of which didn't even work, and my father owns every *Wonder Woman* comic ever published."

But Will's path to gaming was not so straightforward. "When I was young, my parents wouldn't allow games in the house, so I came to the hobby through arcades where I developed a love for fighting games. When I was eventually allowed to have a console, the Nintendo 64, I wanted to experience games that were very different from what I'd played before."

The next few years were spent at comic conventions and flea markets, building up a small cache. Yet Will didn't consider himself a collector, until the arrival of the Dreamcast. "The Dreamcast for me was a perfect system, in that it had arcade games that I could bring home, and it was a system that was so unique and visually distinct," he tells us. "It had weird games like *Elemental Gimmick Gear*, *Silver*, *Cannon Spike*, and suddenly my collection became about trying to understand the history of games and finding strange or unique games that maybe you can't find except on one system or in one iteration."

His shelves are full of such lost and unique games. He holds up a copy of *OutRun 2*, a racing game that Sega delisted when its Ferrari licence expired. "Such a beautiful game," he says. "And it drives me crazy that it will never be rereleased. And let's talk about *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly*. Most people will say the PS2 *FFII* is the definitive version, but there's stuff in the *Director's Cut* on Xbox that isn't in any other release."

Then there are the oddly specific gems: the one-off *All-Pro Football 2K8*, built entirely around the individually licensed likenesses of retired players, the Dreamcast version of *Skies Of Arcadia* which he prefers over the GameCube port, *Ninja Gaiden 2* which he loves for its stuttering framerate when played on a real Xbox 360. He mentions the unpatched ending of *Mass Effect 3*, which can only be played today by using an original disc loaded into an offline console. "That version is basically disappearing," he says.

This is what Will spends a lot of time thinking about: what we'll lose in an all-digital ecosystem. "Physical media preserves a moment in time," Will tells us, before reliving the childhood memory of reading *Final Fantasy VII*'s manual again and again. "Human beings are physical creatures, we like the sensation of flipping through pages, opening a disc, hearing the machine."

He thinks for a bit, then continues. "I think the decline of physical media is a tragedy, not just because we've lost so much that should be preserved, but because we're removing ourselves from a world that is analogue. Trying to make everything digital is never going to be as interesting as holding a real thing."

In a world increasingly slipping toward the digital, Will sees collecting not as clinging to the past, but in building a space where joy is tangible. "Collecting is not really about accumulating things," he says. "It's about building an environment that brings you joy. For me, that's what these games do."

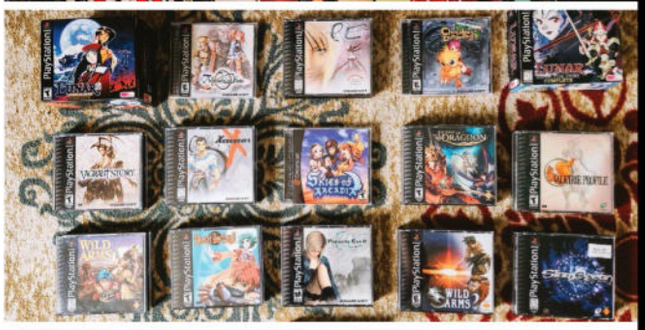
Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

DREAMCAST BUNDLE

"This consists of my Dreamcast, my favourite fighters, and two beautiful Arcade Sticks!"

AMOUNT PAID: $480



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

TYCHUS FINDLAY STATUE

■ "I adore *StarCraft* and this was an, 'If you don't, you'll regret it' purchase, and luckily, it's now worth three times what I paid for it"

PAID: $700

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

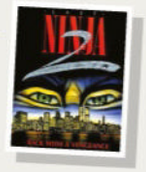
THE COVER STAR

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS (PLAYSTATION 2)

Fumito Ueda and Team Ico's technical and thematic powerhouse was popular, which means copies today are common and happily priced around **£20.**

ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD (MASTER SYSTEM)

This colourful blend of *Alex Kidd* and *Shinobi* costs about **£30,** a bargain for one of the system's best platformers.



LAST NINJA 2: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE (C64)

System 3's ninja game sold over five million copies! Despite this ubiquity, copies are still expensive today at around **£40.**

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (MEGA DRIVE)

No Mega Drive collection is complete without a copy of the blue blur's first platformer. It's cheap as chips as well, rarely costing more than **£10.**

GOAL!

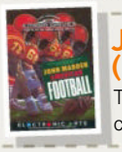
Dino Dini's football games set the standard for sports games in the early Nineties. Today, *Goal!* costs under **£15.**

CANNON FODDER (AMIGA)

Sensible Software's military-themed action game features elements of strategy and shoot-'em-ups. Well reviewed in its day, complete copies cost about **£30** now.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION (XBOX 360)

Rockstar San Diego's lauded open-world game explores the violence of the American frontier. It's rather inexpensive today, at under **£15.**



JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL (MEGA DRIVE)

This 1990/91 edition is the first entry in EA's yearly *Madden NFL* on home consoles, and costs under **£10.**

POWER DIGGERZ (PLAYSTATION)

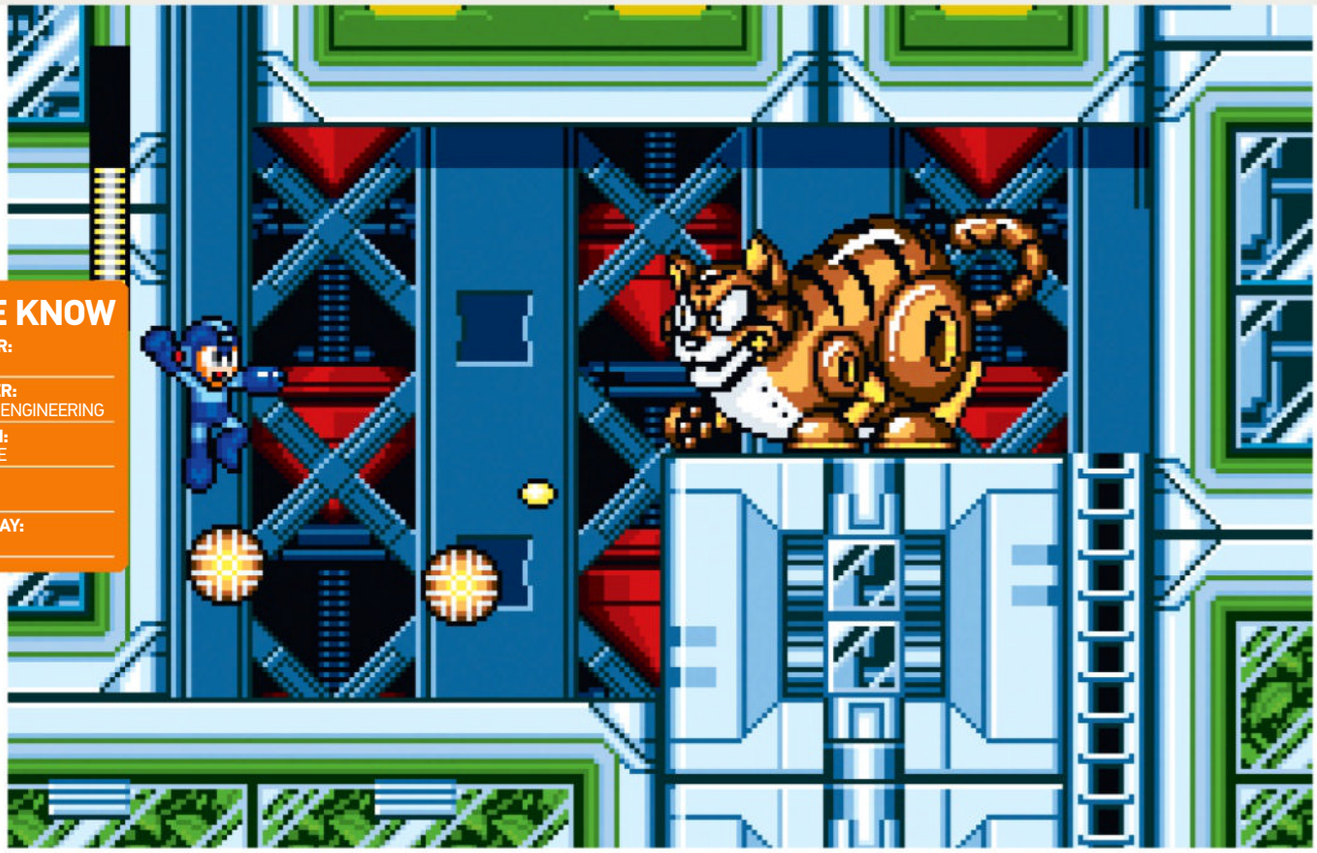
Nick loved this PlayStation curio and you won't need to move mountains of earth in order to own it. You shouldn't have to spend more than **£25** to add this bizarre offering to your collection.

HOW MUCH?!

GAME BOY: STAR WARS EDITION

Available only in the UK in 1997, this rare Game Boy kit included the system and *Star Wars* game. One recently sold for more than **£1,300!**

Prices correct at time of print



» [Mega Drive] This metallic cat is causing Mega Man problems.

MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS

Despite appearing in countless adventures over the years, Mega Man only ever made one appearance on the Mega Drive. As a result you'll need a frightening amount of cash if you want to add it to your collection

Words by Darran Jones

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **» DEVELOPER:** MINAKUCHI ENGINEERING
- **» PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **» RELEASE:** 1994
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £1,000+

» [Mega Drive] Here are the many bosses you'll battle in *Mega Man 3*.

» You'll be lucky to pay under £1,000 for *The Wily Wars* nowadays.

THE GAME

By the time Mega Man made his debut on Sega's 16-bit console in 1994 he was already something of a seasoned platforming veteran. He'd made his first appearance on the NES in 1987 and once *The Wily Wars* had rolled around, his sixth NES adventure had already been released. Rather than make a brand-new game for Sega's console, Capcom instead outsourced the project to the Koka-based Minakuchi Engineering, while it focussed on the SNES *Mega Man X* games.

Interestingly, *The Wily Wars* is actually four games in one as it features graphically enhanced versions of the three original NES games, as well as an additional adventure called Wily Tower inspired by *Journey To The West*, which is only accessible once the first three games have been completed via a single save file. That means you actually had a surprising amount of platforming for your money back in the early Nineties, but even improved visuals couldn't convert Mega Drive gamers and *The Wily Wars* failed to find a big audience on the machine. That's a shame as there's a lot to enjoy here from various tweaks to how the original games run. The aforementioned Wily Tower is also a decent addition and certainly of interest to fans of the series. While the games still remain challenging, the inclusion of battery back-up does make things easier, particularly if your only previous experience of progression in the NES games were via their password systems.

THE QUALITY

Despite including multiple games, *The Wily Wars* wasn't well received on release. *Sega MegaZone* called it a "brave release", going on to mention that, "Although good for its time, these games really suffer when compared with the current crop of platformers." It went on to offer a score of 69%. *Mean Machines Sega* had a slightly better outlook on Capcom's compilation, giving it a final score of 78%. Reviewer Gus Swan said, "It pales completely compared to the recent delights of *Earthworm Jim*, *Headdy* and *Sparkster*," while Steve Merrett said, "Sadly, if *Mega*

» [Mega Drive] We like some of the in-game encounters in *Mega Man 3*, including this huge snake.

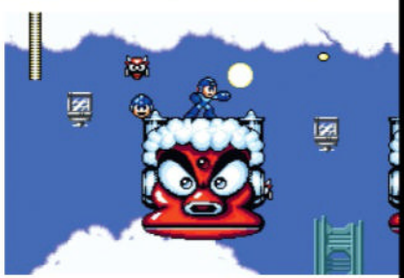
Man has a fault it is that it has dated too much." One of the best reviews came from the Australian magazine *Hyper*, which went on to say, "I bet even the least interested, platform-phobic killjoy will enjoy *Mega Man*'s basic, eminently playable style." That was good for a score of 84%. Over in Japan, Famitsu's reviewers were divided with two 7/10 scores and two 5/10 scores, for a final tally of 24/40.

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

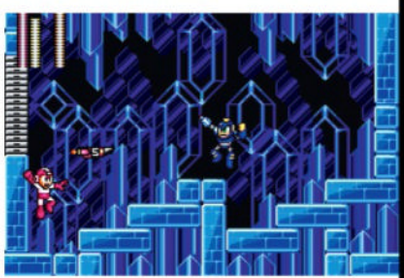
There are a few factors that can help explain why *The Wily Wars* now commands a rather extortionate price on the after market. One of the biggest is undoubtedly its rather middling review scores that would have put many potential buyers off. After all, no one wants to buy a game that's "past it". Outside of general review apathy, perhaps one of the biggest factors towards *The Wily Wars*' rarity now is that it never received an official physical release in the States. Rather than release the game on cartridge like it had done in Japan and PAL regions, Capcom decided to include *The Wily Wars* on the Sega Channel, a download service that ran from December 1994 until July 1998. As a result the game regularly appears on YouTube videos discussing expensive Mega Drive games, which will have pushed up both awareness of the game and interest in its two overseas versions.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

Even though *The Wily Wars* is now a prohibitively expensive game, there are numerous ways to enjoy it legally today, although most of the available options are pricey. The easiest way to enjoy the collection is via the Switch, as it's included as part of its Nintendo Classics service. Just be mindful that you'll need a monthly subscription in order to access it. If you fancy owning a Mega Drive copy, but don't have a spare grand in your pocket, Retro-Bit Gaming reissued the game (with less slowdown than the original version) in 2021. Copies can fetch £100 now, but it's still significantly cheaper than owning the original version. Finally, *The Wily Wars* is also included on the original Mega Drive Mini (along with 41 other games) and shouldn't cost more than £80.



» [Mega Drive] We rather like *The Wily Wars*' distinct look, but we understand why it wasn't pleasing on release.



» [Mega Drive] Beat a boss and you'll be able to nab their weapon.

THE BOTTOM LINE

It doesn't matter how you cut it, spending a thousand pounds on a single game is going to be a bridge too far for many gamers. Yes you can argue that it's only really £250 when you consider that it's actually four different games with numerous enhancements over the original NES releases, but with so many other versions available (and even the NES originals) it's hard to recommend. This is one we'd imagine only die-hard *Mega Man* fans will ever consider.

I'VE GOT IT!

These readers made mega purchases

Cheesemeister
I won an auction for *Rockman Mega World* from Book-Off on Yahoo! Auctions Japan on Wednesday, 19 June 2019 at 10:43pm Japan time for 22,540 yen shipped, less a coupon for 5,000 yen off, for a total of 17,540 yen ($161.85 @ 108.37 yen/dollar). [That is very, very specific – Ed]

Thomas Nickel
I bought my copy for the equivalent of 15€ at a local videocentre when they cleared out their 16-bit stock. I also got it signed by Keiji Inafune at a later date.

Jay T
I got a copy from Retro-Bit Gaming It was a rerelease that came with a bunch of goodies. But to be honest, I bought it just for the collection because I'm a big *Mega Man* fan. The NES games are 20x better lol. There are huge downgrades in the Mega Drive version in my opinion.

Star Saber Minus One
I got a reproduction cart from a defunct site called gamereproductions.com It was the first reproduction cart I ever got, it still works and it's great, basically the only reason for me to ever own a Sega Genesis.

ACO
I don't have the cartridge, but I do own the Genesis Mini inclusion.

FPL Nobby
I own it on the Mega Drive Mini which came out a few years ago; does that count?

DANMAKUMAN
I've got my copy thanks to the awesome guys at Retro-Bit Gaming. It's not the original from back then, but their rerelease was still great!

MAGIC: A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Darran looks back at a lifetime of playing Magic: The Gathering, on paper and on his TV screen

My very first introduction to *Magic: The Gathering* was via a chap called Stuart Cresswell. He worked at Tesco with me and invited me along to a community centre in Canford Heath where he played the game with a small group of friends.

Despite having difficulty understanding the Flanking and Phasing rules of *Mirage* (the new set) the game had me hooked and I stopped playing *Spellfire* and *Blood Wars* to focus on *Magic*. Over the next few months I bought new packs, made new friends, and brought over some of my friends from my *D&D* group. By the release of *Tempest* the following year I was buying a booster box (for £45) and we'd all turn up at my house to open our booster packs and do swapsies. Never mind that we were all in our mid-20s, we were having fun.

As time passed I bought out people's collections and eventually sold off the vast majority of my own cards (many of which are now worth hundreds of pounds on the second-hand market). I was finding the game far too costly, especially as board games were often far cheaper and offered a self-contained experience. I couldn't justify paying £112 for four Baneslayer Angels, when all the family enjoyed playing board games with me.

While I stopped playing paper *Magic* a good 15 years ago, I've never stopped playing the game digitally, even though it has been a journey with far more lows in it than highs. Things kicked off rather brilliantly for me in 1997 with an officially licensed game by MicroProse. It remains a solid adventure and while the game's play mechanics have changed massively, it's still fun traversing the overworld and battling various villains and collecting new cards.

Acclaim's *Battlemage* was a slightly earlier game for Sony's PlayStation, but I never played it. It's apparently a pretty terrible RTS and has very little to do with the game itself, one of the reasons I always ignored it. I've also never played the Japanese-exclusive Dreamcast game, but my understanding is that it has more in common with MicroProse's game than Acclaim's.

Things took a turn for the better when *Magic: The Gathering Online* was released in 2002. It's essentially a digital version of the card game with the ability to buy cards online and play matches with a large number of players. I got really into this, buying cards, making a few new friends online via its chat system and taking part in as many competitions as I could afford to enter, but it didn't last.

Magic: The Gathering – Battlegrounds was up next and it was another terrible adaptation of my beloved game, this time by Secret Level Inc. While it attempts to do interesting things, it's not an authentic version of *Magic* and it wasn't long before I sold my copy and went back to the online version of the game.

Then, in 2009, Stainless Games came along with its entertaining *Duel Of The Planeswalkers*. While it was limited in several ways, it took a more arcade-like approach to the game and I quickly spent a large amount of time playing it on Xbox Live with one of my friends in Cornwall. It was certainly buggy at times, but it was successful enough to be followed by numerous sequels over the years, many of which I thoroughly enjoyed. *Magic* finally seemed to be getting decent digital iterations of the game, outside of its popular (if clunky) online version.

Things soon sadly took a dip again with the likes of *Tactics* (2012) and the free-to-play *Magic Duals* (2009), which in retrospect was actually okay. There was even a *Puzzle Quest* variant that had too much of a focus on microtransactions for my liking. Around this time I moved away from digital *Magic* and had started playing *Hearthstone* and that's where I expected my relationship with *Magic* to end. But then, *Magic: The Gathering Arena* was released…

Arena is everything I love and loathe about the popular game. It features the graphical flourishes of *Hearthstone* when you attack and summon creatures, there are always a decent amount of different games to play and no in-game chat means it's a lot harder for opponents to whine or bad mouth you. On the other hand, best of one games can be ruined by mana issues, it's becoming more and more expensive to make competitive decks and it constantly pushes you towards spending real money. It's certainly far from perfect, but it at least allows me to continue playing *Magic*, something I've now been enjoying for nearly 30 years. ✱

MY FAVOURITE MAGIC SETS

VISIONS (1997)
This was the first new set I got to play on launch and featured some of my favourite cards, including Natural Order and Uktabi Orangutan.

MORNINGTIDE (2007)
While I don't personally rate this set, it still has special meaning to me as I met my good friend Greg at a *Morningtide* tournament.

IXALAN (2017)
A *Magic* set where the main focus is dinosaurs and pirates? Of course this was going to get heavily played on *Arena*.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TALES OF MIDDLE-EARTH (2023)
Along with *Adventures In The Forgotten Realms*, this was another set that seemed to annoy traditional *Magic* players, but I loved it.

FINAL FANTASY (2025)
While I don't care for the game series much, everything about the set was on point and it brought a lot of non-*Magic* players into the game.

[XBOX] IT MAY HAVE FEATURED FAMILIAR MONSTERS, BUT BATTLEGROUNDS DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A PROPER MAGIC GAME TO ME.

[PLAYSTATION] IN ADDITION TO ITS RTS GAMEPLAY, BATTLEMAGE LETS YOU CONVERSE WITH FELLOW PLANESWALKERS.

[PC] THE FINAL FANTASY CROSSOVER ON ARENA WAS SO GOOD I ACQUIRED EVERY CARD IN THE SET.
[PC] MICROPROSE'S VERSION OF MAGIC RECREATED PLAYING FOR ANTE, WHICH WAS LATER REMOVED.
[PC] TACTICS WAS ANOTHER GAME THAT TRIED TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT WITH MAGIC, BUT IT DIDN'T REALLY WORK.
[PC] MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE IS VERY AUTHENTIC, BUT ALSO VERY CLINICAL LOOKING.
[PC] I REALLY USED TO ENJOY THE PUZZLE CHALLENGES FOUND IN DUAL OF THE PLANESWALKERS.
[PC] THIS ARENA PLAYER ANGRILY SCOOPED WHEN I PLAYED ULTIMA AND DESTROYED ALL HIS CARDS.
[PC] THE FIRST PC MAGIC GAME WAS GREAT AND I STILL LIKE TO PLAY IT, DATED RULES AND ALL.

DIGITAL OR BUST

Readers on the card-based games they enjoy playing

Retro-Sanctuary
I still play the Sid Meier *Magic: The Gathering* game from time to time. I like the classic card game a lot and it's great to play it with an adventuring framework that puts you under limitations where you have to make the best out of the cards you find until growing your strength.

John Maguire
Solitaire on Windows. I've completed many runs in my time.

Robert August de Meijer
Two of my exes and my current girlfriend love *Puzzle Strike*! I sometimes just play against the computer to wind down, even though it's got hardcore tactics and suspenseful endings. It's made by game design whizkid David Sirlin, hell yeah!

Palette Swap Millennial
Since no one is saying it: *The Lord Of The Rings: Adventure Card Game*. It's different enough from the real-life game that it feels fresh and fun but still very Ringsy.

Slices of Pys
Baten Kaitos. I picked up the remastered version on Switch and am really enjoying it. Also *Balatro*. Absolute digital crack.

sirfozzie
Balatro, *Monster Train 2* (my current obsession), *Slay The Spire*, and I'm looking forward to *Into The Grid*.

Psi/Ben
I love paper and digital card games. *Marvel Snap* has stayed in my daily rotation since its launch. *Pokémon Pocket* too, although that's a glorified sticker album. Also, it's been a few years but I've thought about *Inscryption* nearly every day since I played it and have dipped back in multiple times.

Rat Stash
Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket, yeah it may not be as in-depth as others but it's incredibly addictive and I finally know how the card game works after all these years...

ACO
I'm going to stick to licenses I grew up with, so *Pokémon Trading Card Game Pocket* and *Yu-Gi-Oh! Dark Duel Stories*. Both on the Game Boy Color.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

A TRIBUTE TO NICK THORPE

Hi **Retro Gamer** team,
I'm just writing to say I'm so sorry about Nick. I absolutely loved his articles, the way he wrote and his passion for retro gaming. I can honestly say that his Back To The Noughties section was the first thing I flicked to, and his articles really stuck with me, from *Sanvein* to *Kurushi*. Like me, Nick was someone who found refuge in retro gaming and the comfort of great games, and without his articles, I think the magazine will feel a little bit emptier. Nick, thank you for all the memories, and I'm so sorry they didn't last any longer.

I've done a little drawing to remember Nick by. It would mean the world to me if you feature it in the mag. So, to the one and only Nick Thorpe, a legend and the greatest retro gamer of all time. Thank you!
All the best,
Henry Matthews

» It's amazing just how much of Nick's work Henry remembered in this picture.

Thanks for the lovely words, Henry. Darran was able to share your drawing with Nick's mum and she was delighted with it. We're glad that Nick's writing left such an impression on you and that Back To The Noughties meant so much to you.

» Matteo was kind enough to share some of his favourite features that Nick had written over the last 13 years.

» *Sonic The Hedgehog* and Sega's Master System were a big part of Nick's life.

PAYING RESPECT TO NICK THORPE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I just wanted to tell everyone at **Retro Gamer** how much I appreciate what you do. I think of you as family – a very special kind of family that I see regularly and never disappoints. I know it's a parasocial relationship, but I was crushed when I learned of Jason Kelk's death and doubly-so to learn of Nick Thorpe's all-too-early passing. You put a tremendous amount of yourselves into every issue and it shows. I cannot overstate how much you've touched my life and, I am absolutely certain, the lives of so many others.
Kind regards,
Brigg Barsness
Kenosha, WI, USA

Dear **Retro Gamer** team,
My deepest condolences regarding the passing of Nick Thorpe. I always loved reading his features and he sounded like an incredible person. His love for Sega always led to great features.
Warm regards,
Matteo Fossi

Dear Darran and team,
As a long-time reader and subscriber of **Retro Gamer** I wanted to share my sincere condolences on the loss of Nick. It's such terrible and unexpected news, especially for someone still so young with so much to offer the world. I really enjoyed his articles, and as a Sega fanboy, I shared in his nostalgia and deep love for the brand. Whilst I never owned five Master Systems like Nick did, it was my first and one of the more memorable consoles growing up in Australia. Again, I am terribly sorry for your loss and hope you continue on his legacy through the magazine that was a big part of his life and is also such a big part of your own. Take care.
Nick

Dear Darran and the **Retro Gamer** team,
I read this morning of the sudden passing of your friend and colleague Nick. I want to send you all the condolences and prayers that I can spare and hope that Nick knows how much he meant to the readers and those that met him. Legends are always taken from us too soon.
Take care and stay safe
Kindest regards,
Darren Nicholls

Hi Darran,
I'm so sorry to hear about the passing of Nick. Please pass on my condolences to both his family and friends. He was such a lovely bloke and I imagine that a lot of people have been saddened to hear the sad news.
Warm regards,
David Jesudason

A huge thanks for the many kind words about Nick. We've been overwhelmed by the response to Nick's passing, both via the magazine and

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on social media. Nick was an unassuming guy, so he'd have been bowled over by your many kind messages. Now excuse us while we go away for a little cry.

PHOTOGRAPHIC FLASHBACKS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I love the idea of a shared photographic history as suggested in the letter in issue 278 from Michael Normington. I myself was stymied by a lack of easy-to-find photographic evidence of the interior of almost any American arcade when researching the history of redemption games (arcade games that dispense tickets redeemable for prizes).

What I didn't discover until completing the project was the Gaming Alexandria Discord server (gamingalexandria.com). There's a passionate community of coin-op enthusiasts here who have unearthed a huge trove of photos and found footage of arcades. If some Eighties B-movie ever shot location scenes in the Metro Centre in Gateshead, that's where you could find it!

As always, I love the magazine. I'm closing in on 20 years of subscribing. I'm not sure I've subscribed to anything for longer!

Michael Bentley
Seattle, Washington USA

You're right Michael, it's a great idea. We'll see what we can do.

» [Mega-CD] When he wasn't championing *Sonic* or the Master System, Nick had a soft spot for FMV games, particularly *Night Trap*.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Nick Thorpe

As you can imagine it's been a difficult month for the team, due to the loss of our dear friend. Our daily meetings have been that much duller without Nick to cheer them up or share some joke, and it's sad to think that we'll never hear him waffle on about *Sonic The Hedgehog* or Sega's Dreamcast anymore. Some of us worked with Nick for 13 years and his brilliant writing and overall compassion is something we're all going to miss greatly.

» We'd have never known about the brilliant archival work being done by Gaming Alexandria without Michael Bentley telling us.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Nick Thorpe article?

Santa Hurricane
The *Sonic 3* cover feature in issue 249 was an incredible and informative article, somehow teaching me more on my favourite game than I thought possible. It was a pleasure to have him on my stream to discuss it as I played *Sonic 3* on original hardware for the 30th anniversary of the game.

Daryl Baxter
Not only was Nick fantastic in helping me make my features shine for the mag, but he even managed to help source the *Sonic 1 Beta* – long considered the Holy Grail. It partly inspired me to start work on Book 3. I'll always be grateful to him.

MYST+
The one Nick wrote for the PlayStation cover the mag did. That's the one that made me buy **Retro Gamer**, and the reason Nick and I became friends over a decade ago. The details of the article escape me, but the friendship that came from it will stay with me for the rest of my life. I miss you, Nick.

Robb from 8/16/32bit
Pick just one? I can't do it. His passion for games was evident in every piece he wrote, and I always enjoyed his articles, even if I wasn't a fan of what he was covering.

retrofan01
Like me, I think his first console was the Master System 2 so I always enjoyed anything he wrote about that system as well as sharing his passion for the SMS's first *Sonic* game in particular. His work felt like the heart of the magazine in general though (Back To The Noughties, etc).

David Desi Pubs Dason
Nick helped me so much in the production of my articles – patiently helping me take screenshots using emulators on my crappy tablet. Please pass my best wishes to his family and friends. He was one of the kindest people in the business.

» Santa Hurricane was a big fan of Nick's excellent *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* article.

retro GAMER

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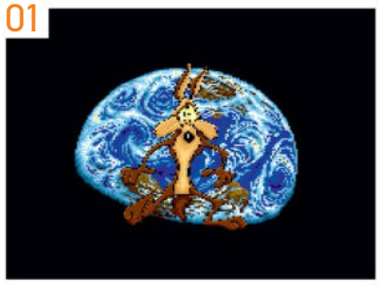
ENDGAME

LOONEY TUNES: ROAD RUNNER

» You know, in North America this game is called *Road Runner's Death Valley Rally*. That's far cooler than the PAL title, don't you think? Sure, you might imagine a racing game instead of the standard licensed platformer this is, but a little confusion is a price worth paying to avoid such a generic title.

01

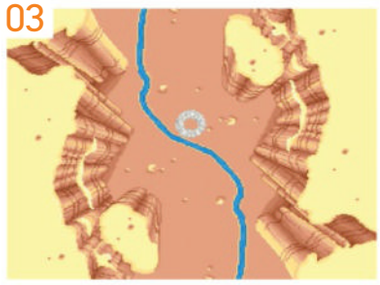


» Wile E Coyote would pursue Road Runner to the ends of the Earth, and even beyond. But when the battle extends into space, getting home certainly won't be pretty.

02

» He's read the script, he knows what's coming as well as you do, and he appeals to the developers to spare him the inevitable impact that follows such a plummet of such proportions.

03



» Alas, there will be no mercy for this miscreant's misfortune. Coyote meets canyon at some considerable speed, and a circular cloud of dust rises into the air – just like in the cartoons.

04

» And here's Road Runner, who arrives just after the mangled mutt has been blown up by some Acme goods. What does the bird have to say? "Beep beep." That's all it ever says. But as it runs off, there's a less familiar sound – one that almost resembles an opera singer...

05

» Of course. It couldn't end without the fat lady singing, and here she is, right on cue. Our hapless heel raises an umbrella, but a bomb shelter would be more appropriate for this adverse weather. As he's pounded into a pancake, Wile E Coyote vows that *next* time will be different.

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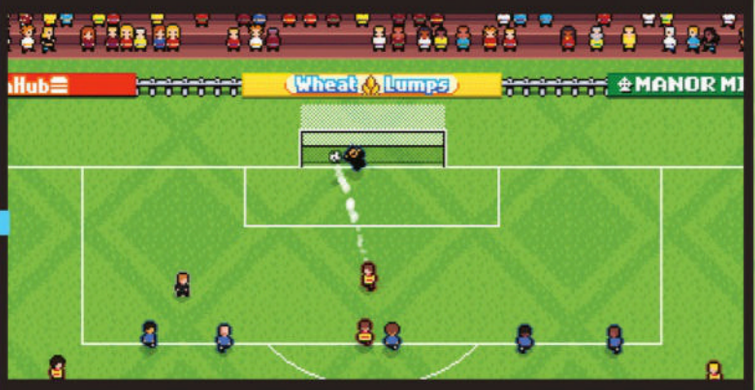

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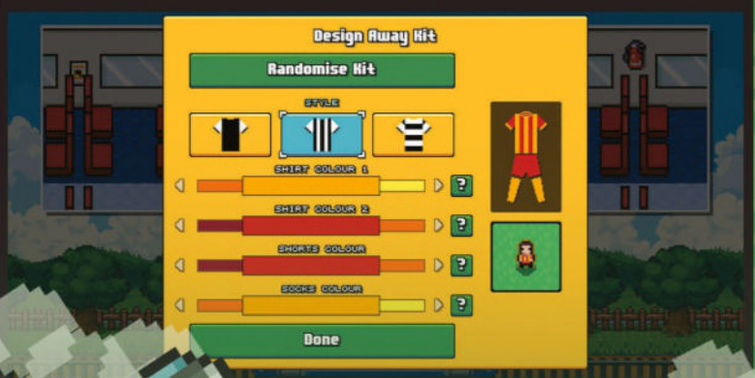

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